PERIL PRESS presents:

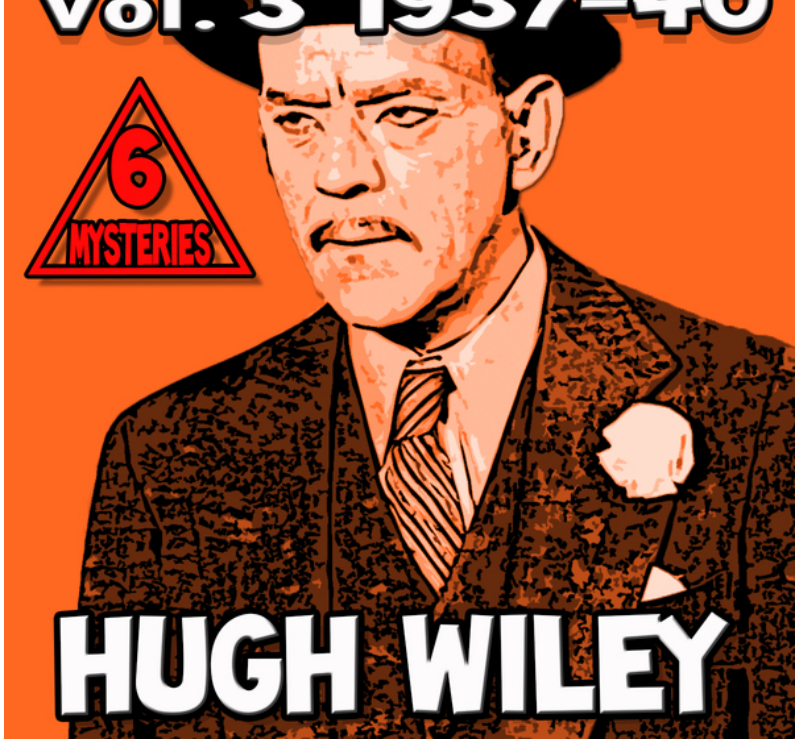
MR. WONG

THE FAMOUS EXPLOITS OF DETECTIVE JAMES LEE

COMPLETE COLLECTION

Vol. 3 1937–40

6 MYSTERIES



HUGH WILEY

PERIL PRESS presents:

Collier’s, February 13, 1937
HANGMAN’S KNOT
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Collier's, June 25, 1938
THE FEAST OF KALI
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Collier’s, February 17 1940
THE HEART OF KWAN YIN
by Hugh Wiley

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Collier's, February 13, 1937
Mr. Wong:

HANGMAN'S KNOT

by Hugh Wiley

illustrated by Irving Nurick

Another adventure of James Lee, wherein he demonstrates how a lamp cord can kill a man

Hangman's Knot. James Lee, in defense of a Chinese.
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Presently James Lee said, "What this, if you don't mind, Mr. Harris"

THE roundup of the Tyler-Delmar narcotic crew had meant three months' hard work for James Lee. Now, on Thursday evening, with the principals in custody and with evidence enough to cinch the case against them, James Lee finished his report of the capture. This accomplished, he contemplated the rare pleasure of a leisurely dinner and a restful evening alone in his San Francisco apartment.

He drank a glass of sherry and walked into his dining room. Ten seconds after he was seated at table a buzzing telephone signal broke the silence of the quiet room.

His servant brought the instrument to the table. "This is James Lee

speaking."

"Moy Sam in deep obeisance has the honor to address you."

"A felicitous moment. I am at your service." There followed a two-minute conversation in fluent Cantonese.

James Lee hung up for ten seconds and then put a call through for one of his assistants. When this man was on the line, "I am going to Sundale at once," he said. "I may be down there for a day or two. You will take charge in my absence. If the chief calls me put the message through to Moy Sam's house in Sundale. If I'm not there you can find me through the office at Mineville."

To his servant, "I shall not have the pleasure of eating the excellent dinner which you have prepared for me," James Lee said. "I am driving to Sundale at once to visit my countryman Moy Sam. I shall be away for a day or two."

James Lee got up from his dining table. Five minutes later he was in his car headed south for Sundale.

Moy Sam's house was an aggregation of ramshackle buildings that had accumulated through a space of fifty years. He received James Lee in a narrow apartment which he used as his office. After appropriate greetings had been exchanged according to the Ritual of Right Conduct, "I have summoned you because our countryman Sung Ling is in serious trouble," Moy Sam said. Then, setting forth the nature of Sung Ling's difficulties in cackling Cantonese, "He is in jail accused of the murder of a white man," Moy Sam continued.

"Who was the murdered man?"

"His name was Henry Stone. He was a wealthy rancher who lived in the center of his apricot orchard three miles from here."

JAMES nodded. "I read of the murder. I did not know that Sung Ling was suspected."

“That fact has not yet been published. I learned that the evidence against Sung Ling is sufficient to destroy him. I believe that he is innocent.”

James Lee lighted a cigarette. “Tell me about the murder,” he directed.

“The dead man was fifty years old," Moy Sam began. “He was one of the leading men of this town. He fought in the war and was prominent in the veterans’ societies. For ten years he has employed labor that I supplied during the fruit season. Last year he replaced the Chinese men that I sent him with Armenian families and with stragglers who desired work.”

“Why did he replace your Chinese laborers with these other people?”

“It was a question of wages,” Moy Sam said. “There is a limit to poverty.”

James Lee nodded. “I understand. Where was Henry Stone killed?”

“He was killed within a hundred feet of his own residence on his ranch. The murder was committed about nine o’clock at night.”

“The motive?”

“Robbery. Mr. Stone had drawn nearly two thousand dollars out of the bank at three o’clock that afternoon.”

“What bank?”

“The First National Bank of Sundale.”

“He took the money with him?”

“No—after he took it out of the bank he placed it in his safe-deposit box in the vault of the bank.”

“How do you know this?”

“Everybody knows it.”

“When did he pick up the money?”

“By special arrangement with the president of the bank he was permitted to open his safe-deposit box after the bank had closed. He got the money out of the box shortly after eight o’clock.”

“You say he was killed at nine?”

“Yes. Mr. Stone spent half an hour With Mr. Kendrick in the bank. Maybe three quarters of an hour.”

“Who is Kendrick?”

“President of the bank. He is—”

“And then Stone drove to his ranch to pay off his men?”

“His men, his women and his children,” Moy Sam answered. “It is a motley crew—families of various nationalities, casuals—men, women, boys and girls.”

“At what hour in the day is it customary to pay these people?”

“Mr. Stone paid them at night.”

“How late do these people work?”

“Until long after sunset—often in the summer nights until nine o’clock.”

“HOW was Stone killed?”

“Mr. Stone was strangled to death with a cord.”

“What kind of cord?”

“It is not strictly a cord. It was an electric light wire—fine wires covered with rubber and with braided cotton.”

“What kind of a knot did the killer use?”

For a moment Moy Sam’s lips thinned to a straight line. “That is an important point. The knot was a hangman’s knot. No Chinese man has ever used that knot.”

James Lee nodded.

“Exactly,” Moy Sam agreed instantly.

“Why do the police suspect Sung Ling?”

“Because they found the stolen money in his bunk.”

“Planted?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Was any of the money missing?”

“The banker, Justin Kendrick, says that none of the currency is missing from the package found in Sung Ling’s bunk. There was something over a hundred dollars in silver in a canvas sack. This sack was found untouched in Henry Stone’s car an hour after he was murdered. Sung Ling’s in jail, in Mineville, now.”

After this James Lee was silent for a moment and then, “I’ll go over to Mineville in the morning,” he announced. “Just now I will impose upon your hospitality for sleeping quarters, a hot bath, a cup of good black wine.”

ON FRIDAY morning Lee interviewed Deputy Sheriff Harris, who had taken Sung Ling to the county jail. “Old Moy Sam seems to think that Sung Ling is innocent of Henry Stone’s murder,” James Lee began. “What is your opinion, Mr. Harris?”

The local officer hesitated. Then, “You mean—off the record?”

“Of course.”

“In the first place they found the money in the Chink’s bunk. In the second place there was plenty of motive—he was sore at Henry Stone. We’ve had trouble with Moy Sam’s outfit before.”

“You mean—violence?”

The deputy nodded. “Lots of white men mix into Moy Sam’s fan-tan game. There’s been a dozen knife plays in his joint in the last five years. Half the decent people of Sundale have tried to get us to run Moy Sam and his gang out of town.”

“What stopped you?”

“The main thing was the man that owns the building. His name is Walter Morgan and he’s got a lot of influence.”

“Where does he live?”

“He lives right there in Sundale. The building has been declared unsanitary half a dozen times. August Alsberg has turned in a dozen reports on it. He’s the sanitary inspector.”

“Where does he live?”

“You can find him in Sundale. He’s a plumber.”

“I’ll talk to him. . . . Have you got the cord that was used to strangle Henry Stone?”

“I’ll get it. Be back in a minute.”

Returning presently with the ten-foot length of electric cord that the strangler had used, “Here it is,” the deputy announced. “Doctor Adams had to cut it to get it the "victim’s neck.”

James Lee looked at the severed loop that the strangler had used. "Thirteen turns. . . . Tied to the left. . . . I may want to look at this cord again."

James Lee got to his feet. "I'll be going along now," he said. "Thanks for your help, Mr. Harris."

RETURNING at once to Sundale, James Lee paid a brief visit to old Moy Sam. "What about this cord that strangled Henry Stone? Was that taken from your establishment?"

"I do not know. The building inspector made us replace all of the old equipment five years ago. I think the cord did not come from my house."

"In addition to your regular patrons what white men have been here in the last month?"

"The man who is building inspector for this town has been here. The owner of the building has been here. He had two men with him. He threatened to sell the place over my head."

"For what reason?"

"The people of the town resent my presence. The owner contemplates new tenants. He had two men with him the last time he called. One of them runs a poolroom; the other was a man who might be his partner. They spoke of opening up a new poolroom and remodeling my house for that purpose."

"What were the names of these two men? Do you remember?"

"The proprietor of the poolroom is Captain Ed Raymond. The man who was with him was Clarence Faulkner. I have known them a long time. Captain Raymond spoke of setting up Mr. Faulkner as proprietor of the new poolroom."

"They live here in Sundale?"

Moy Sam nodded. “Both of them have lived here a long time.”

For a moment James Lee looked up at a trio of buzzing flies that circled the lamp cord hanging from the center of the ceiling. Then, “I’ll be back in an hour or two. Where can I find the owner of this building?”

“He is a real-estate man. Walker Morgan. His office is next to the bank.”

Leaving Moy Sam’s establishment, James Lee Walked to Walter Morgan’s office adjoining the First National Bank of Sundale. “I am James Lee,” he said, introducing himself to the real-estate man. “I am interested in the Henry Stone murder case.”

“I’m pleased to meet you, Mr. Lee,” Walter Morgan said. “Are you working for Henry Stone’s side of the case?”

“No—I’m working for Sung Ling.”

“You’re wasting your time. That Chink’s plenty guilty. It’s plain as day.”

“Nearly everyone seems to hold that opinion. . . . Mr. Morgan, who is Captain Ed Raymond?”

“He’s a good egg that runs a pool hall down the street here. He figures on branching out a little bit. He’s been talking to me about a lease on Moy Sam’s joint.”

“You visited the place with Captain Raymond recently?”

“I was in there with him not long ago. Ed and Clarence Faulkner and I looked the joint over. You see it’ll take a lot of money to fix it up the way Ed wants it.”

“WHO is Clarence Faulkner?”

“He used to run a photograph gallery here in Sundale. He went to

war for a couple of years and since he came back he's been sort of a partner with Ed Raymond in the pool hall."

"Was Captain Raymond his commanding officer by any chance?"

"I don't think Ed was in the war. The Captain part of his name is sort of an honorary title. Clarence went overseas with a lot of the boys here from Sundale—Elmer Hagen and August Alsberg and Kendrick, the banker next door here, and poor Henry—"

"You mean Henry Stone?"

"Yep. It's a mighty funny thing that Henry lived through five or six heavy battles in France and then came back and had a Chinaman strangle him to death. He was a mighty good man. He was a lieutenant for a while and then they made him captain. Mighty popular with the Legion post here in town."

"What was your decision on Captain Raymond's project? Are you going to give him a lease on Moy Sam's joint?"

"I haven't quite made up my mind."

"I'd like to have a talk with Captain Raymond and with Mr. Faulkner. Where do you suppose I can find them?"

"You'll find Ed down at his pool hall. Like as not Clarence will be there too."

"I'll be going along, Mr. Morgan. Thank you very much for your information. You don't think there's any doubt about Sung Ling's being guilty?"

"Not the shadow of a doubt in my mind. Go over and talk to Doc Adams and see what he has to say. He'll convince you."

James Lee shook hands with Walter Morgan. "Captain Raymond's pool hall is down the street in this direction?"

"About a block and a half down, in the middle of the block. There's a sign over the front of it that says 'Pastime Club.'"

When he had introduced himself to the proprietor of the Pastime Club, "I'm working on the Henry Stone murder case," James Lee explained. "Old Moy Sam asked me to see if I could do anything to help Sung Ling."

Captain Raymond frowned. "The best thing they can do with that guy is to hang him right away," he suggested. "I been through a lot of tough stuff myself but I never see anything as rough as the way Sung Ling bumped off poor Henry."

Captain Raymond looked over his shoulder at a man who had walked up to the cigar counter from the second pool table farther back in the main room of the Pastime Club. "Shake hands with Clarence Faulkner," he said. "He's my helper around here."

AFTER he had shaken hands with the man, James Lee reached into his coat pocket and hauled out a package of cigarettes. "Will you have a cigarette, Mr. Faulkner?" he inquired.

"Much obliged."

"Will you have a cigarette, Captain Raymond?"

"No, thanks."

To Clarence Faulkner, "I was just telling Captain Raymond that I am working on the Stone murder case," James Lee explained. "It looks like Sung Ling is in a bad spot."

Faulkner scowled. "He ought to be. That Chink is a bad egg."

"Why do you suppose he killed Henry Stone?"

Clarence Faulkner hesitated a moment and then, "In the first place the chances are Sung Ling lost all his wages and needed money. He never worked very steady anyhow."

"You mean he lost his money at the fan-tan game?"

Faulkner nodded. “Either fan-tan or buying ten-cent tickets in the lottery.”

Captain Raymond helped himself to a couple of salted peanuts from a bowl on the cigar counter. “I’d like to run all them Chinks out of the country.”

"Captain Raymond, you made up your mind about leasing Moy Sam’s place?”

“Who told you I wanted Moy Sam’s place?"

"I’ve been talking with Walter Morgan.”

“He talks too much. I ain’t made up my mind yet. It might be a good joint if it was fixed up. Clarence here figures he can make another poolroom pay, but I think maybe the town is too small for it.”

James Lee nodded. Then to Clarence Faulkner, “Mr. Morgan said you were in the war.”

“I’ll tell the cockeyed world I was in the war. I saw the show from August, ’17, to three months after the Armistice.”

“Signal Corps?”

Faulkner looked quickly at James Lee. Then deliberately, “No—I wanted to get into the Signal Corps but . . . things didn’t break that way. I was a buck private from start to finish. Infantry.”

“Clarence got a handful of medals over there,” Captain Raymond interposed. “He was a fightin’ fool.”

Faulkner frowned. “Forget it,” he said sharply. Then more evenly, “The Signal Corps was my dish but I got aced out of it. I’m a photographer. I could have done a lot more in the Signal Corps than I did on the back end of a bayonet.”

“You went over with a local outfit, Mr. Faulkner?” James Lee reached again for his cigarettes.

“About thirty of us boys from Sundale went over in a bunch. Henry Stone was our Loot for a while and then he got to be the skipper.”

“Won’t you have another cigarette, Mr. Faulkner?” James Lee asked, extending his package of cigarettes.

Faulkner took one. “Much obliged,” he said.

James Lee shook hands with Captain Raymond. “Good luck,” he said. “I’ll see you again some time.” He turned to Clarence Faulkner. “Who is the commander of your American Legion post?” he asked. “I’d like to have a visit with him before I leave.”

“Henry Stone was head of the outfit for a while. Edgar Warner is topside right now. He runs a garage—the one this side of the bank.”

In the Sundale Garage, to Edgar Warner, “I’m working on the Henry Stone murder case,” James Lee said. “I’d like to use ten minutes of your time if you don’t mind.”

“I’ll help you all I can.” Warner wiped his hands on a piece of waste and shook hands with James Lee. “Come into the office. Are you working for the county?”

“I’m working for Sung Ling,” James Lee "answered. “He’s in a mighty tight place. They’ve got the case cinched against him.”

“Two or three people have told me that. What I want to ask you of all, do you know Walter Morgan?”

“Sure I know him. He’s a good friend of mine.”

“Do you know that Captain Ed Raymond has discussed leasing old Moy Sam’s place? Discussed it with Morgan?”

“Clarence Faulkner told me something about that. Clarence has sort of been drifting around for the last five or six years without much to do. Ed figured he might start a new pool hall and let Clarence run it.”

"Do you think it would be a good investment?"

"Clarence is fairly popular with everybody in town. Did you meet him?"

"I MET him," James Lee said. "I've just been talking with him and Captain Raymond. He told me he was in the war with you and with Henry Stone."

"A lot of us home-town boys went over."

"Faulkner was in Henry Stone's outfit, Wasn't he?"

"Yes, he went over as a private and stayed that way."

"Stone commanded the company that Faulkner was in?"

"Most of us Sundale boys were in Henry's company."

"Was Captain Stone a good officer? Was he popular?"

Edgar Warner smiled. "Sometimes you can be both. He got along all right with us. He was hard-boiled when he had to be. I never had a kick coming."

"You say Faulkner was a private all the way through?"

"Henry made him a corporal a couple of times but something always happened to keep him from moving on up. The first time Clarence got drunk and Henry broke him. I forget what happened the next time. I know Clarence was sore as a boil at the time. He tried to get a transfer to the Signal Corps but Henry didn't let him go."

"Why not?"

"I don't remember. It was just one of these two-men clashes that the grouches are always having with the skipper. Henry was sure hard-boiled in the pinches."

“Faulkner came out of the show with some decorations, didn’t he?”

“He got everything except the cook-stove. Henry broke him just before the Argonne mess. Clarence kept himself steamed up on cognac after that whenever he could get it. He was drunk as a fool the day he stepped into the gas and knocked over a machine-gun outfit. That’s what got him the Distinguished Service Cross.”

James Lee nodded. “The courage of desperation. Is that what you’d call it?”

Edgar Warner shook his head. “Not in a million years. You know how a man gets after he’s been stepped on; he either dogs it or runs wild. I guess Clarence figured he’d teach Henry a lesson. He got out of it all right with the medal but he come dog-gone near copping a General Court instead of the medal. Sort of a singlehanded show-off that almost cost us thirty or forty men.”

James Lee nodded. “They’re dangerous people to have around when the shooting begins. . . . Who is Captain Ed Raymond?”

“Ed’s a good egg. Sort of a tough bird that drifted over from Reno. He run a gambling joint in Reno for a while. Before that he was down in Memphis, from what he says. He started out with a med show.”

“How long has he been around here?”

“Ed blew in about ten years ago.”

“Where does he tie up with old Moy Sarn?”

“He never got along very well with that Chinaman. Ed started a lottery here in Sundale about five years ago. He always figured that Moy Sam beat him to it with the Chinese tickets. You know there isn’t room enough on one lottery ticket for Mexico, Cuba and China, all three.”

James Lee nodded. “I know. There's one more question I’d like to ask you. Where does August Alsberg come into this picture? I mean,

is he friendly to old Moy Sam?"

"August is friendly enough to everybody. He's sanitary inspector for the town. Plays both ends against the middle. He's a plumber, you know. Every time he knocks out some pipes he puts them back and charges a dollar an hour for it."

"There's plenty for him to do around Moy Sam's establishment—both ways."

"Alsberg always took it easy on that layout on account of the owner. Walter Morgan owns the place and Alsberg is a pretty good friend of Walter's. He does a lot of work for Walter."

James Lee reached for a cigarette. "I guess that's all I wanted to know," he said, extending the package of cigarettes. "Will you have a smoke?"

"Thanks." Warner took a cigarette and lighted a match. He held the match over to James Lee. "I'll bet you run into a lot of complicated cases in the course of a year, Mr. Lee."

"Some of them are complicated. Some of them are simpler than you think."

ON THE sidewalk in front of Warner's garage, James Lee looked at his watch. "Three-ten," he mused. "I'll drive to Mineville and have another talk with Deputy Harris."

At 3:40, after an easy piece of driving that left his mind free for the problem that confronted him, he found Deputy Harris in the office. "Can you spare an hour on the Stone case?" he asked.

"All the time you want," the deputy answered.

"Have you got a chemist here at headquarters?"

"We're not that fancy. Jim Boyden does most of our work. Works

for us and the coroner. He's the head man of Boyden and Traverse."

"Where's their shop?"

"About two blocks from here."

"Bring that piece of lamp cord that strangled Henry Stone. I want to run a test on the stuff that stained it."

The deputy smiled. "Like as not it's whisky. Just a minute, get it."

Meeting the senior member of the firm at the Boyden and Traverso laboratory, "I want to run a test on a stain in a cotton fabric, Mr. Boyden," James Lee said.

"What are you looking for?"

"Any of five or six things. Specifically, pyrogallic acid, silver nitrate and hyposulphite of soda."

"Come along. I'll fix you up."

In the laboratory, from the braided cotton insulation of the stained section of the lamp cord. James Lee cut three small fragments. "Working with a keen edged lance he looked up at the deputy sheriff. "I guess between us we can explain the mutilation of this cord to the court when the time comes," he said, smiling.

The deputy frowned. "I don't know that I ought to let you do that," he said.

"I'm sorry. It's done now."

Interrupting. "What do you want to use on the pyrogallic acid?" Boyden asked. "Will you use the Richardson method?"

"Not sensitive enough," James Lee answered. "Let's try the Colombe test. It takes a few minutes longer but it's more definite. I would like Mr. Harris here to watch the final reactions on the pyrogallic acid and the hyposulphite of soda, if you don't mind."

Boyden smiled. “Easy lessons in chemistry. Can I help you?”

James Lee nodded. “I’d be glad to have you rum the hyposulphite of soda test. Here—use this fragment of the insulation.” Turning to Deputy Harris, “This will take fifteen or twenty minutes," James Lee said. "Incidentally, Mr. Harris. you have observed, of course, in examining that lamp cord that there is not a flyspeck on it.”

“I hadn't looked for flyspecks,” the deputy answered.

James Lee handed the man a ten-diameter glass. “Take this lens and have a look. I examine it closely, but I don’t believe that there are any flyspecks on that lamp cord. If there are, you have some unusual flies in this part of the country."

James Lee turned away from the deputy and for the twenty minutes following, working rapidly, he concentrated on the problem in chemistry. Presently, “Watch this, if you don’t mind, Mr. Harris. See, the liquid in this test tube is blue at the moment. If pyrogallic acid is present a drop or two of this other liquid will change the blue color to a deep purple. . . . There. There it is. Deep purple. You have just seen—”

Interrupting James Lee, “Hyposulphite of soda is present,” Mr. Boyden announced.

James Lee turned to the chemist. “Thank you, Mr. Boyden.” A smoldering light in James Lee's eyes flamed for a moment.

“IS THIS the Henry Stone murder case?” the chemist asked.

“Part of it," James Lee said. Then, turning to Deputy Harris, “That winds up the chemistry for the moment. Incidentally, are there any flyspecks on that cord?”

Returning the lens to James Lee, “I didn’t find any. That's mighty strange. That’s a good lens, Mr. Lee.”

“That’s a perfect lens,” James Lee agreed. “Come along‘. We have

another bit of work to do."

Defining and amplifying the bit of work that remained to be done, "If you work fast it shouldn't take you more than an hour to round up the man who murdered Henry Stone. If there's any doubt in your mind as to the advisability of making the arrest you can make it on my authority."

The sheriff's deputy looked sidewise at his companion. "You sure of your stuff?" he asked. "Who is the guy?"

James Lee's eyes narrowed. "Clarence Faulkner killed Henry Stone," he said.

The deputy grunted. "You make the pinch, Mr. Lee. I'll ride along. Clarence ain't no more guilty than I am. I've known him thirty years."

James Lee frowned. "Come on. I'll make the pinch. If I'm not mistaken I'll have a confession out of Faulkner five minutes after we round him up."

At six minutes after five, facing Captain Ed Raymond in the Pastime Club with Deputy Sheriff Charles Harris at his side, "I neglected to tell you that I'm a federal operative," James Lee said.

Coming back quick as a flash, brazenly, "So what?" Captain Raymond inquired.

"I'm not interested in you, Captain Raymond. Is Mr. Faulkner around here?"

"He's in the back of the house. What do you want with him?"

Cold as ice, "That's my business."

"I'll get him for you."

"Don't trouble yourself. There's probably a back door to your joint. Sit steady—that's all you have to do."

James Lee Walked into the back room of the Pastime Club. He faced Clarence Faulkner. “Come along,” he said quietly. “You are under arrest.”

“How do you get that way?” Faulkner reached toward a rack that held a dozen billiard cues. “I’ll knock your head off if you don’t get out of here!”

“Take it easy,” James Lee suggested. “You can’t beat the game. I arrest you for the murder of Henry Stone. . . Steady! or I’ll blow your heart out!”

There were ten seconds of silence and then, “I’ll come along,” Faulkner said quietly.

IN THE sheriff's office at Mineville fifty minutes later, midway in his confession, Faulkner stopped abruptly. He turned and faced James Lee. "I killed Henry Stone," he said. "I'll go through with this confession, but before I finish it up tell me how you worked it out."

James Lee shook his head. "Go ahead! You've only got another paragraph or two."

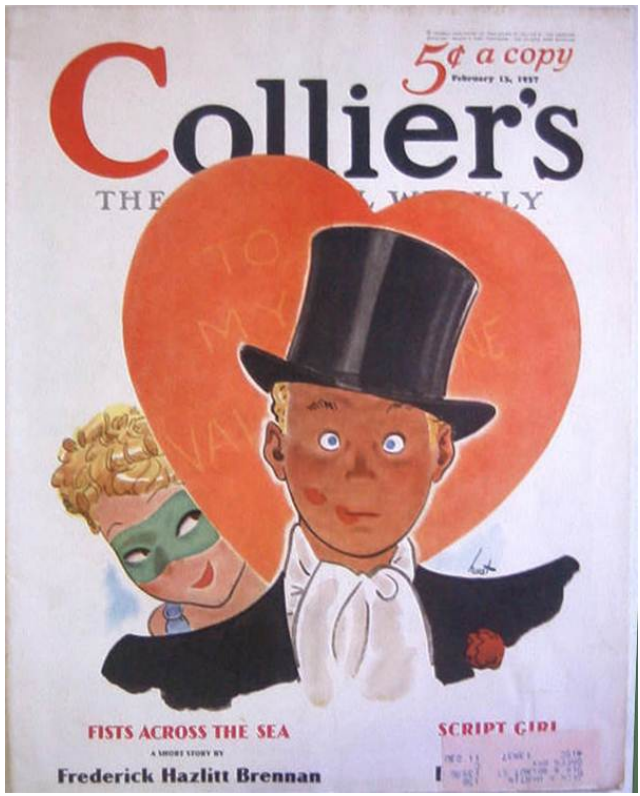
Three minutes later, when Clarence Faulkner had signed his name, "I'd like to know how you pinned the heat on this bird, Mr. Lee," Deputy Harris invited. The deputy looked around at the assemblage. The sheriff of the county and the chief of the Sundale police force and three other officers of the force waited in silence.

"First of all," James Lee began, "there were no flyspecks on the lamp cord." He directed a quick smile at Deputy Harris. "How many places in Sundale can you find a lamp cord twenty-five years old that isn't flyspecked? The only answer I know is in a photographer's laboratory. Flies don't like the fumes. For item two—a left-handed man tied the death loop. In the third place, no Chinese strangler would ever use that knot."

James Lee lighted a cigarette. "When I met Faulkner I knew that he had a motive for hating Henry Stone. Faulkner accepted two cigarettes from me. He reached for both of them with his left hand. He is left-handed. It happens that he has a little photograph gallery. I don't remember exactly when I began to suspect Faulkner. I was reasonably sure he was the killer after the stains on the lamp cord turned out to be chemicals used in a photographer's darkroom. . . . Mr. Sheriff, I wonder if you'd do me the favor of releasing Sung Ling. I'd like to take him back to Sundale with me."

The sheriff of Vale County walked over to James Lee. He held out his hand. "You can have Sung Ling, Mr. Lee, and you can have any other favor that I can do for you. Next time I get in a jam you'd better look out or I'll use another day of your time."

James Lee smiled. “You flatter me,” he said. “This game is mostly luck.”



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Collier's, November 6 1937

NO SMOKING

by Hugh Wiley

Illustrated by Irving Nurick

Another adventure of James Lee, wherein the suave detective finds a cigarette good for his health

Smugglers' cover

ON FRIDAY morning in San Francisco, James Lee summoned two of his assistants, Riley and Wilbur, to his Grant Avenue

apartment. “They’re letting Joe Maletti off the Rock tomorrow.” he said. “He will be deported, but you know his record as well as I do. Have your men tail him day and night until he gets out of the country. Hong Kong and Macao are loaded with opium. Spot Maletti’s visitors. The Immigration people will get the links on him as soon as Alcatraz lets him go. but they’re only riding him to Canada. He’ll probably be at work again a week after immigration delivers him across the line. California is short on hop and Maletti won’t overlook a bet. Let me have daily reports on him until Vancouver reports him in.”

A week after Joe Maletti was turned over to the Canadian authorities Vancouver lost his trail. Vancouver’s report of failure wound up with a hopeless note: “Probably heading for New ‘York or Yokohama, but definite information zero.” Reading this. James Lee smiled grimly.

To Riley and Wilbur ten minutes later, “Open the Joe Maletti file again,” he directed. “He’s probably back in California—maybe in San Francisco.” After a moment. ‘Did you read yesterday’s report from Hong Kong?”

Riley answered. “We read it,” he said.

“What’s the guess?”

James Lee picked up a mimeographed news bulletin. “Listen to this,” he said: “ ‘Architects for Mrs. Saralr Canning Stolb. wealthy and eccentric founder of the Mystic Destiny cult, have completed plans for the temple buildings to be erected in the colony of Mrs. Stolb’s followers in the Santa Cruz Mountains south of San Francisco. The central edifice *will* be a replica of the Sea Guard Tower of Canton. This tower or temple, its pillars and beams of teakwood lacquered and gilded, buill in the time of Hung Ming, will be duplicated in very detail by Chinese craftsmen in Canton. Chinese artisans will be sent to California under bond to assist in the construction of the historic Oriental structure.’ “

WHEN he had finished reading, “The Sea Guard Tower is five stories high,” James Lee said; “the roof beams in the second and third stories are very heavy timbers—twelve-by-eighteen stuff, thirty feet long. I have a hunch, nothing else, that we might do

well to look that timber over pretty carefully when it gets .here. . . . They would have been more adroit to have waited with their lacquer and their gold leaf until the timbers were in place."

"That stuff warps mighty bad in this climate." Riley said. "They'll have to store it some place for a year."

"Yes," James Lee agreed.

"The gilt and the lacquer mean that the timbers will be boxed carefully or wrapped some way to protect them," Wilbur offered.

James Lee smiled. "Right. Don't forget that international amenities will block the job of having a looksee out in the open—you'll have to work under cover."

"Where do you suppose they'll store the stuff?"

"It's heavy and hard to handle and it's got to be protected from the weather." Jam.es Lee suggested. "Some of the local hardwood importers will probably be asked to lease storage space."

After a moment, "Has Joe Maletti got anyone working in Canton ?" Riley asked.

James Lee frowned. "You forget old Yut Sung and bis millionaire son-in-law, Chang Wing. They're still operating. They've furnished Maletti with five million dollars' worth of stuff in the past. . . . I'd say offhand that Yut Sung will be on the job at his end of the line. I've asked Hong Kong for a weekly report on his opium stocks."

WITHIN the week, justifying James Lee's accurate prediction, old Yut Sung left his house in Hong Kong and caught a steamer for the thirty-five-mile trip to Macao. He was met in the Boa Vista Hotel by two Europeans who took him at once to the office of the Double Treasure gambling house. A fan-tan game with fifty patrons in the front room received a casual glance from Yut Sung. A gamble for heavier stakes engaged him.

In the sanctuary of the Double Treasure office. "The price for immediate delivery?" he asked, getting down to business.

There was some haggling and then, "A sample of the opium!" Yut Sung demanded.

When this had been furnished and after he had inspected it. “It is of good quality,” Yut Sung agreed. “I will pay the price you ask.”

‘The place of delivery?”

“The house of the Blackwood Cutters’ Guild on Tai Sun Street in Canton.”

This accomplished, Yut Sung returned to his Hong Kong house. To his son-in-law. Chang Wing. “I have made a good bargain today.” Yut Sung boasted. “It remains for you to see that our profits are not lost.”

On the day following, to James Lee’s apartment on Grant Avenue, there came a message in code. Translated, it read: “Yut Sung large purchase opium Macao immediate delivery Canton.”

To his assistants, Wilbur and Riley, “Yut Sung is on the job again,” James Lee announced. “It probably means that Maletti has resumed operations at this end. Sung is taking delivery at Canton. Maybe our guess about the teakwood beams for the Sea Guard Tower will ring the bell.”

Routine work on a dozen other cases for seven weeks, and then one night a Chinese man stepped out of a darkened doorway in Chinatown to confront James Lee.

“Death comes now,” the man said in guttural Cantonese.

James Lee felt the muzzle of a pistol against his ribs.

“The place of your departure from life is the Cavern of Silence in Gamblers' Alley.”

“What if I prefer to meet death here?” James Lee asked.

“Be silent!”

“There is a time for silence. This is not the time. What has your master paid you for this job?”

“Enough. Be silent!”

“I will purchase my life with yours,” James Lee suggested quietly. “Two men behind us . . . that man crossing the street toward us. Put your gun away if you desire to live.”

The killer faltered. “He said your guards would not accompany

you tonight. That you would be out alone."

"He is a notorious liar, this master of yours. I know him well."

"You know him!"

Instantly, "Maletti," James Lee said in an even voice. "Now, you poor treacherous dog, if I am right, come with me and I will buy my life with more gold than your master gave you to destroy it."

"Who am I to question the Will of Heaven?"

"What did Maletti promise you?"

"One hundred dollars."

"In cash or in the drug of dreams?"

"Thou art of deep perception."

"Come quietly with me," James Lee directed. "Two five-tael tins! Opium of a quality fit for the governor of a province shall be your reward."

AT HIS apartment, from a cache of evidence reaped in an opium raid of the previous year, James Lee presented his acquaintance of the evening with two tins of opium. Still speaking Cantonese, "Accept these as a trophy of our encounter," he said. "And now, what are your plans?"

"First of all, master, I shall forget tonight and this world in the vapors of your princely gift."

"Naturally. And then?"

"Who knows? I could not serve you?"

"Rotten wood cannot be carved."

"I would work very faithfully for you."

"I fear that your pledges can be bought " James Lee said curtly. Then, "There is a possibility that you will communicate presently with the man who hired you to destroy me. You would do well to avoid him for a while. If you ever see him—"

The telephone bell on James Lee's desk interrupted the speaker. Ten seconds later "Riley speaking. Yut Sung has sent his son-in-

law, Chang Wing, to San Francisco. He is in an apartment within a block of your place."

"Thank you. What else?"

"Another Chinaman is with him. Wilbur thinks he is one of the shrimp crew."

"Probably. Get a couple of men on the job—Sabin and Parrish if they're free. Come and see me in half an hour."

"Right—9:45."

Jim Riley hung up the phone. James Lee turned to his visitor and completed his interrupted statement. "If you ever see Maletti, tell him, for me, that a stone lion does not fear the rain." James Lee's eyes narrowed. Hard lines lay at the corners of his mouth. "Tell him that he owes me for the lives of two men—and the n I shall collect the debt. That is all. Now go your way."

At the doorway of the apartment the man hesitated. "A wise man understands a nod," he said. "Master, I will work faithfully. I will repay your favor."

"Be gone!" James Lee interrupted harshly. "Over the gates of hell is written, 'You repent too late.' "

When the man had left, James Lee returned to his library. He summoned his servant. "A glass of sherry," he said. A sudden black reaction claimed him. For a brief moment it seemed that a fatigue, born of an overwhelming sense of futility, would stay the energy, the power of action, that characterized his constant struggle with each succeeding crew of criminals.

THEN under the influence of the warming sherry, zest for the intricate game against the foes of society returned. Alert confidence marked his demeanor when, ten minutes later, he greeted his assistant.

"Sabin is on the job tonight," Riley reported. "Parrish relieves him at eight o'clock in the morning."

"Fair enough. We have some plans to make. The presence of Yut Sung's son-in-law indicates that we can begin the job of spotting his customers," James Lee suggested.

Riley nodded. “What's your last report on the teakwood timber shipment?”

“Hong Kong reported a dozen junks out of Macao ten days ago. The timbers for the Sea Guard Tower have been shipped. Three or four weeks more and we stage the big raid. Now let's frame the program for Yut Sung's advance agent. I can't spare Sabin and Parrish on that job after next week.”

Within the month, through his various agencies of information, James Lee confirmed his belief that Maletti was back of this latest narcotic project.

To Riley and Wilbur, planning the next moves in the game, “The Continental Hardwood Company will handle the timbers for the Sea Guard Tower,” he reported. “Incidentally, they will get the contract for erecting the structure.”

“I thought that work was to be done by Chinese labor,” Riley said.

“The Continental people will have the contract,” Lee repeated. “They will use their own equipment for heavy lifting. The Chinese artisans will put the finishing touches to the structure after it is assembled. We'll need some time to look the timbers over at the Continental plant.”

“How do we get in without Maletti knowing it?” Wilbur asked.

“That's your job,” James Lee said. “I suggest that you plant a couple of agitators in the company's yards and promote a walkout. If you get the yards shut down see that the police department covers the picket line with their men. You, Riley, can see that the watchmen on the night shift are on our pay roll. If we're lucky, and if we find the stuff, we can round up the entire shipment in one night's work.”

“What about rounding up Maletti?”

“We use the opium as bait if we find it. We'll bring it to my apartment here. From there on we'll see what happens.”

On the night of the raid in the deserted storage yard of the Continental Hardwood Company, a quarter-inch electric drill in James Lee's hands bit its way through two inches of hardwood and then raced free without resistance.

Within an hour, after a quick series of borings, “They've evidently been systematic about it,” James Lee said to Riley. “The cavities are eight inches wide and two feet long at the quarter points of the beams. Open them up seven feet from each end. Don't mar the main timber any more than you have to. Split the two-inch covers and rip them off.”

An hour before dawn, “It's a good thing that you two 'watchmen' drove your big cars tonight,” James Lee said to Riley and Wilbur. “Eight thousand five-tael tins will just about be a full cargo for you.”

At seven o'clock that morning, with the treasure of opium stored in his apartment on Grant Avenue, “Get some sleep now,” James Lee suggested, smiling at Riley and Wilbur. “Report back here at noon. We'll probably have a lead on Maletti by that time.”

FOR a while thereafter, James Lee could find nothing in the reports from his foreign agents to indicate that Maletti and Yut Sung had made any move to repair the loss they had sustained in the capture of the opium that had been shipped in the timbers for the Sea Guard Tower. The cables in code from Hong Kong reported business as usual in the Macao factories.

“They're playing safe.” Riley suggested to James Lee. “Maybe the Japanese market is absorbing all of the stuff.”

“You mean Manchuria?”

“Manchuria and the regular trade,” Riley said.

“As nearly as Hong Kong can figure it there has been a factory surplus of thirty per cent for the past six weeks. Who is getting it?”

Riley shook his head. “Search me. Chief,” he said. “That's your business.”

James Lee smiled thinly. “Right now as part of my business I'll make a guess,” he said.

“What's the guess?”

“In the first place it isn't characteristic of Maletti or of Yut Sung to quit after losing the first bet. You know the old stuff as well as

I do—lose a dollar and bet two. Double the bets to cover your losses."

"So what?"

"They're half a million to the bad on the last play. It's probable that there's another million-dollar cargo under way."

Riley scowled. "It's a cinch they can't try the teakwood beam trick again."

"Right. They'll probably fall back on the old rush system."

"Honolulu transfer to an American ship?"

"All of that is blocked," James Lee said. "We've got to watch for some tramp steamer drifting up from South America. They'll probably have a try at that play. It's old, but it works oftener than anything else."

AT FOUR o'clock in the afternoon under a dripping gray fog, convoyed by half of the power boats of the fishing fleet, the Sandala, six thousand tons and red with rust, cleared Point Bonita and came through the Golden Gate under a slow bell. Beyond the great span of the Golden Gate Bridge a signal for dead slow rang into her engine room. Three rumbling notes from the Sandala's whistle punctuated the wailing fog signal on Alcatraz. The ship hung in the tide due south of Lime Point for twenty minutes and then, out of the fog, quartering in to her starboard side, there came a fifty-foot power launch. Up forward on the Sandala a tarpaulin ripped away from a bit of cargo revealed a stack of five-gallon oil tins. A cargo winch coughed free of condensed steam and a moment later a slingload of the oil tins went over the side to the deck of the power launch. Three slingloads and the work was done. The signal for half speed ahead rang down to the Sandala's engine room. . . .

ON a night when the Sandala was a thousand miles out on her trip to Japan, disappointed with the narcotic reports from his various agencies of information in California, James Lee resolved to do a little exploring in the local colony of his countrymen. An hour after he had penetrated into Chinatown, encountering old Moy Gar, who had been a pork butcher, James

Lee remarked the quiet demeanor of the elder Chinese man.

“Kwan Yin has smiled upon you?” James Lee asked after a felicitous salutation.

Old Moy Gar blinked his narrow eyes. “Coarse rice to eat—I have enough of that. My bended arm for a pillow, these rags that I wear—what more could I demand from Kwan Yin and Milo Fo?”

A sweetish acrid odor of opium, more pronounced than usual, lay in the dead air of Moy Gar's basement.

“Long life, sons to mourn at your grave,” James Lee said quickly. “I would enjoy the honor of a prolonged visit with you so that I might benefit from the wisdom of your words, but at the moment guests await me at my house.”

James Lee's guests were Jim Riley and Frank Wilbur. “Old Moy Gar is smoking first-class stuff again,” he said, greeting his two assistants. “If he can afford it, it means the price is down. Maletti and Yut Sung have probably turned the trick. Moy Gar was reeking with opium. Stupid with it.”

“What's the program?”

“First of all, we'll have a look at the shacks on Suisun Bay—the north shore. The man Maletti hired to kill me came from that fish camp.”

“Tonight?”

“Right now,” James Lee announced.

“We'll take my car and cross from Martinez to Benicia. I'll be with you in ten minutes. I want to get into some old clothes and drape a gun under my left arm.”

When Riley and Wilbur had left the apartment James Lee walked to the desk in his library. From a sealed carton of cigarettes that lay in a locked drawer of the desk he took an unopened package. He dropped these in the right-hand pocket of his coat. In his bedroom, from a case containing a collection of pistols and revolvers he selected a short-barreled .30-caliber automatic.

Leaving his apartment, he wore this gun in a shoulder holster under his left armpit.

At the curb where the car was waiting, “Let's go,” he ordered. “You might as well drive, Wilbur. Head for Martinez and keep her rolling.”

Frank Wilbur nodded. “Where do we go from there?”

“We'll follow around to the north shore of Suisun Bay as far as we can.”

“That fish camp—the Sea Treasure Company?”

“That's it, but we'll stop half a mile before we get there. I want to prowl into that joint on foot.”

Now Riley asked a question: “Have you got anything definite on the fish joint?”

“Fairly definite,” James Lee answered. “Maletti paid a Cantonese man to rub me out a few weeks ago. I did a little trading with him. . . . There's some mighty good opium in Chinatown tonight. I think perhaps the Sea Treasure shacks are hot territory.”

AT MIDNIGHT, four miles north of Benicia, where the railroad swings to the right from the highway toward Fairfield, “We'll stop here,” James Lee said to Wilbur. “You stay with the car. You will come with me, Riley, as far as the railroad track. If you hear any shooting both of you will close in as fast as you can. It will probably mean that I need help and need it badly.”

Leaving Riley at the railroad embankment, in the darkness James Lee walked east until he came to the first tidal channel of the complex system of waterways that threaded the slough north of Suisun Bay. In the faint starlight he explored the swampland northward for a thousand feet until he came to a narrow footbridge that led eastward to the open waters of the bay. His pathway was a series of ten-inch planks, some of them warped and twisted by the weather. The going, difficult enough in daylight, was acutely hazardous. The tide was out and a spill from the footwalk would have meant nothing more than a ten-foot fall into the mud of the swamp, but there were several important reasons why the midnight prowler used every precaution to avoid falling.

As he remembered the layout, there was less than eight hundred feet of the rickety footwalk to be traversed. When he had covered

three fourths of the way a noise up ahead brought a picture of the problem that he would face in an encounter with a pedestrian bound in the opposite direction. He halted, listening for a moment. “If there is someone coming,” he reflected, “I'll swing down underneath and hang onto one of these barnacle-covered pilings until he passes.”

After a moment, reassured by silence, he resumed his journey. Presently, looming large in the meager starlight, fifty feet ahead of him he saw the first of the ramshackle structures wherein the Chinese fishing crew lived and worked. He remembered that there was a wider walk leading to the left somewhere up ahead and that this walk ended on a wide platform that surrounded the half-dozen shacks of the establishment.

“The third building to the left—headquarters.” he recalled. “Two windows and a door on the west front. A fifty-foot platform east of it.” He came to the wide walk and turned to his left. Three seconds later, up ahead, lighted windows marked the main building. “I wonder if they have an alarm system rigged.”

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On the instant there was no further need for surmise. The door swung open and a brilliant beam from a flashlight cut through the dark and blinded him.

“Hola!” *he* said. *“K'u chin t'ien lai.* Sweet after bitter, to have found sanctuary.”

The voice of a man speaking Cantonese bade him advance. Then, “Who comes at this late hour?”

“A traveler weary and torn with hunger and thirst “

“Enter this house. You are welcome to food and drink.”

James Lee walked through the doorway of the shack. He faced two Chinese men. One of them bowed to him. “Good evening. Mr. Lee,” he said. “You do not know mi I am Chang Wing.”

From a dark corner of the room, “And never mind the shooting, Mr. Lee. I'll do plenty for both of us.”

This was the voice of Joe Maletti.

James Lee turned toward Maletti. “I wanted to have a talk with you, Joe,” he said. “I thought I'd find you here.”

“Listen, Chink, I'll do the talking.” Maletti walked into the center of the room. There was a long blue .45 automatic in Maletti's right hand. To Chang Wing and his companion Chinese, “Get out of here!' Maletti ordered. “I don't want no witnesses to what's coming. Come back when I call you and not before—unless the signal bell rings.”

Maletti turned again to James Lee. “Wise guy, ain’t you? Didn't you feel that thread across your ankles fifty feet out from shore?”'

James Lei smiled. “That was slick work,” he smiled. “Those rigs are good, when they work.”

“This one worked.” Then, “That hophead tongster tip this joint off?”

James Lee shook his head. “This joint has been hot territory for a long time.”

“It's going to be too hot for you.”

“Maybe not.”

“Too hot for you, I said! Listen, Chink, you're not singlehanded tonight, but your foot slipped on one bet. You might have an army back of you on land, but the bay is clear. I know that

much."

"I don't need an army, Maletti. I'll admit that you're a good thief, but after all you're nothing but a thief."

"Cut that out right now or I'll blast if it costs me—"

"If it costs you half a million? That's a high price to pay for one shot. That's why I came over here tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen, Joe, you don't think a man gets rich in this game of mine, do you?"

"I know one of them in your game that ain't gonna get rich. He's gonna get bumped and mucked. You're going to take a trip at high tide till the fish eat you. You'll be a skeleton in rags by the time you hit the Golden Gate."

"I'll give you a wave when I pass Alcatraz—you'll be back on the Rock, Joe, by the time I drift that far."

MALETTI snarled: "One more crack like that and you get it through the neck! Chink, tonight you're going to choke to death on your own blood!"

James Lee smiled. "That's a pleasant thought, but I don't want to talk about those things. I came over here to make a deal with you."

"Deal for what?"

"Well, let's start with a half a million dollars' worth of opium."

"Burned up by this time."

"Wrong again—it's parked away safely in my apartment in San Francisco."

Maletti looked puzzled. "I heard that but I thought the punk was lying to me."

"It's the truth. Suppose I ante that shipment for a fourth interest in the business? You and Yut Sung doubled your bet on your second consignment, didn't you?"

“You know too much.”

“My men tell the truth. A fourth interest—how about it?”

“And you stay under cover?”

“I wouldn't last a day out in the open.” Maletti was silent for a moment and then, half to himself, “If you move out it would put a crimp in the works that would let us clean up big in the next year. There's only one hitch. I might ride, but the other two Chinks—”

“You mean old Yut Sung and this flashlight artist?”

“That's Chang Wing, his son-in-law.”

“I know it. How about letting me handle that end of the trouble?”

Maletti hesitated.

James Lee reached into his pocket for the package of cigarettes that he carried. He ripped the outer wrapper from the package and dropped it on the floor.

Maletti saw him tear away the paper and the fold from one end of the package.

“Lay off of them quick moves—frisking yourself.” he said. “I've let you keep your rods on you so far. Don't scare me that way again.”

James Lee selected a cigarette. “You mind if I reach in my vest pocket for a match?”

“Reach and be damned.”

James Lee held the package of cigarettes toward Maletti. “Have a cigarette?” he invited.

Maletti took a cigarette and tapped it on the arm of his chair.

James Lee lighted a match and held it out to Maletti.

“Never mind that match, Chink. I got matches of my own. Don't get too close to me.”

James Lee nodded. He lighted his own cigarette.

Maletti put his cigarette in his mouth and reached for a match. Before he found one ins head fell forward. A second later he

crumpled in the chair where he sat. The gun dropped from his hand to the floor.

James Lee picked it up. Standing beside Maletti for a moment, “Poor, crooked fool.” he said half aloud. “I had to do it.” He held the automatic away from him then and fired a shot through the roof of the shack.

There was a sound of pattering felt slippers. When Chang Wing came through the door, James Lee swung the .45 straight in line for the man's heart. “Only a dead snake is straight,” he said in Cantonese, firing as he spoke.

To the man behind the dead Chang Wing, “You have served an evil master. For you perhaps repentance may come in time to save your life. Speak the truth now! Where is the black gum of dreams, the treasure of opium that these men brought in?”

Cringing with fear, “It's in an iron tank under this room,” the man said. “Tins of oil were emptied to provide—”

“I know that. Where is it?”

“An opening in the floor behind you. A ladder leads downward —” .

“Silence! Show me!” James Lee commanded.

The trembling man lifted a grass mat on the floor, revealing a hinged door. He raised this door. “It's dark below,” he said.

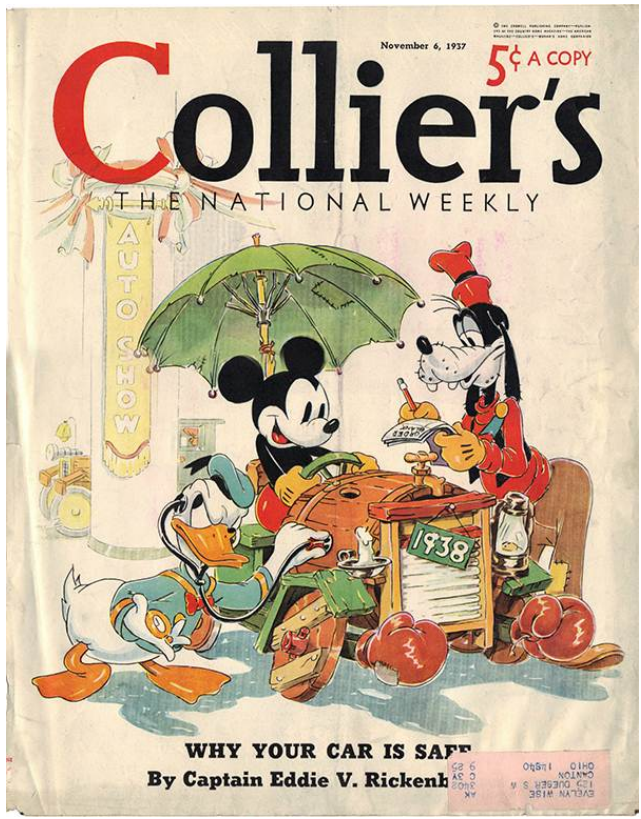
“Enough for the moment! Close the door to this room. . . . Now wait where you are.”

Seven minutes and then, answering Jim Riley's hail through the darkness, “All safe!” James Lee answered. “Come ahead.”

WHEN Riley came into the room where the two dead men lay, “Maletti and Chang Wing,” James Lee announced. “Dead. The dope is down below. Get the links on this fellow and hold him while I have a looksee.”

Jim Riley coughed violently, saying, “Chief, I've been on pins and needles. In a pinch I wouldn't trust that poison cigarette trick as far as I could throw a bull by the tail. You've got to play mighty heavy poker to put it over.”

James Lee smiled grimly. “Hydrocyanic crystals always work,” he said. “But you've got to be careful to pick the right cigarette for yourself and leave the nineteen loaded ones for your playmate.”



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Collier's, January 8 1938

THE EYE OF HEAVEN

by Hugh Wiley

Illustrated by Irving Nurick

In which James Lee, Chinese-American undercover man, brilliantly proves that the cleverest crook cannot walk two roads at once

Detective James Lee gives a memory test

In four strides Lee was at Kenman's side. He shook Kenman's inert form. "This man is dead!" he announced

In four strides Lee was at Kenman's side. He shook Kenman's inert form. "This man is dead!" he announced

IN HIS apartment in San Francisco James Lee sensed the fact that someone was standing in the darkened doorway of his library. "What is it?" he asked abruptly.

His servant, Lin Sung, answered. "One of our countrymen—Moy Hop—desires to consult you."

"On what subject?"

"The human memory is limitless," Lin Sung suggested. "On the eleventh day of the sixth moon last year there was a deed of violence perpetrated in this city that gave you deep concern."

James Lee frowned. "The eleventh day of the sixth moon would be—August 26th."

Lin Sung nodded. "In the Western fashion," he agreed.

“August 26th—that would be the Wagner jewel robbery.”

“Exactly.”

“What has Moy Hop to do with that?”

“Who am I to know all between Yang and Yin? He desires to confer with you on the subject.”

“Bring him in.”

When Moy Hop had been ushered into James Lee's library, after appropriate greetings had been exchanged, he observed, “No man has explored the wide sea of human memory.”

“Continue, if you please.”

“The jewels that were stolen in the Wagner robbery—it happens that I remember the illustrations and the descriptions of some of these diamonds and emeralds.”

“You mean the newspaper descriptions?”

“Even so. These stolen jewels have never been recovered?”

“To my knowledge, not one of them,” James Lee stated. “Why are you interested in them?”

Moy Hop's eyes narrowed. “I think that I saw several of these large jewels in a bracelet presented last night to Miss Louise Cuboni by my master, Harper Kenman.”

JAMES LEE glanced at the clock on his desk. “That's very interesting,” he said to Moy Hop. He reached for the telephone directory and got the number of Leslie Wagner's residence.

To the jeweler, he said, “James Lee speaking—Bureau of Investigation. I have a lead on your August robbery. By any chance have you paste replicas or crystal models of any of the larger stones that were lost?”

“I have replicas of most of the emeralds and of all the large diamonds.”

“Can you bring them here now?”

“I can be over in a few minutes. I have to stop in at the store and

get them."

"Right. I would like to have you bring a handful of other imitation jewels with you—emeralds and diamonds."

"I don't get you."

"I have a man here who may be able to identify the stolen jewels. His story will carry more weight with me if he can pick them out of a lot of similar stuff."

"I understand. I'll be at your apartment in thirty minutes."

Within the hour, from an array of approximately two hundred unset paste diamonds and emeralds spread in glittering disorder on James Lee's desk, Moy Hop, houseboy for Harper Kenman, began his memory test. The stones were spread over an area two feet square and he worked through them rapidly with a thin ruler after the manner of a fan-tan dealer. "This is one," he said three minutes after he began his inspection. He selected a green stone from four that lay along the edge of the ruler.

A look of pleased astonishment flashed to Leslie Wagner's face. "He's right!" he exclaimed.

James Lee nodded.

"This one—and this." Moy Hop picked up an eight-carat rectangular paste diamond and another green stone. "I am—" he hesitated. "I'm not sure that this white stone is in Miss Cuboni's bracelet. I'll put it back."

FOR a moment James Lee's glance lifted to Moy Hop's face. Moy Hop did not look up from his task.

"Wonderful memory!" Wagner exclaimed. "That stone—"

James Lee silenced Wagner with a lifted hand.

A minute later from eleven stones against the edge of the ruler Moy Hop selected three. "Two diamonds—and this green stone."

At this, in spite of James Lee's protests, "That's wonderful!" Wagner complimented. "So far one hundred per cent. Listen, Mr. Lee, no mere talking can bother that fellow.'Marvelous memory!"

James Lee, indulgent of Wagner's enthusiasm, smiled at the

jeweler. “I suspect that you do not play chess,” he said cryptically.

Wagner, once more absorbed in Moy Hop's problem, did not reply.

After a moment when the array of stones to Moy Hop's right had dwindled to fifty, “This green stone,” Moy Hop decided, and then quickly, from the next row against the ruler's edge, “And this one —and this.”

Moy Hop arranged the four paste diamonds and the four emeralds, the green and white stones alternating. He laid the ruler down and looked at James Lee.

“The bracelet,” he said, “that my master gave to his lady was like this.”

Moy Hop laid the ruler down and looked at James Lee. “The bracelet,” he said, “that my master gave his lady was like this”

Now with all restrictions of silence removed, Leslie Wagner, exulting in the hope of regaining his lost treasures, began a garrulous tribute to Moy Hop's skill. “I've never seen anything like it in the history of the human race on land or sea,” he said, admiration shining in his eyes. To Moy Hop, “Boy, you're cut in for a mighty big chunk of reward money if—”

James Lee tapped the edge of his desk impatiently. “All of that will come later, Mr. Wagner. You may let the case remain in my hands, if you don't mind.”

Wagner frowned. “Moy Hop isn't going to be aced out of any reward. . . . I beg your pardon, Mr. Lee.” A look in James Lee's eyes had interrupted the jeweler. “You're the doctor. Excuse me. You can understand how I feel about this.”

“I understand,” James Lee said.

“IT'S marvelous!” Excited, Leslie Wagner reached for a cigarette. His hand trembled while he lighted it. “It's marvelous,” he repeated. “Where do you suppose Kenman got hold of those stones?”

James Lee countered with another question: “You're sure that the eight stones here, selected by Moy Hop, were part of the loot in your August robbery?”

“Absolutely. How did Moy Hop know about them?”

“He read the papers, I suppose, after the robbery. He may have seen them exhibited in your window. The point is, his photographic memory has brought us this far.”

“What's the next move?” The jeweler threw his cigarette in the fireplace. “Cuboni's people announced her engagement to Kenman a week ago,” he said.

“Do you know her?”

“I've known the Cuboni family for years.”

“Do you know Harper Kenman?”

“I've met him several times.”

“What about him?”

Leslie Wagner halted and looked straight at James Lee. “What do you mean?”

“I mean—what do you know about Kenman?”

“I wish you'd send these two men out for a moment.” Wagner nodded his head at Moy Hop and at Lin Sung, who stood, silent,

back of his master's chair.

Before James Lee could speak Lin Sung laid his hand on Moy Hop's wrist. He turned to James Lee. “We will be in the kitchen if you want us,” he said.

James Lee nodded at his servant.

“Thank you.” When the two Chinese had left the library he turned to Wagner.

“Tell me everything you know about Harper Kenman.”

“There's a little that I know and more that I've heard,” Wagner began.

James Lee nodded. “Shoot the works. Let's have all of it.”

Leslie Wagner closed his eyes and began reaching around in the archives of his memory for the data on Harper Kenman. “He was in New York around 1930. He went broke in'29. He had been in China on a railroad deal that blew up before that—building some railroads for one of the Chinese governments. He landed here and milled around for six months. Then he blossomed out as one of the vice-presidents of the Pacific Orient Trust. They floated a lot of phony irrigation bonds and a Persian oil enterprise. There was some talk of appointing him a member of the State Railroad Commission, but that blew up. He financed a jerkwater movie enterprise down the peninsula. That blew up. He made some money out of selling half a dozen old ships to Japan. He cleaned up in that crooked radio deal four years ago. He's about forty years old, and is one of the most engaging, affable men I've ever met.”

“One of your customers, by any chance?”

LESLIE WAGNER reached for another cigarette. “That's how I happen to know as much as I do about him. He has been in the store many times. I never bothered much about his credit.”

“Does he own that house that he lives in out on Pacific Avenue?”

“Yes. He bought it from the McAlpin estate after Joe died. Paid cash for it.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Some time in September last year. That's about all I know about him, except what the society editors whipped up announcing his engagement to Louise Cuboni.”

“He sounds interesting. Do you figure he's a crook or an honest man?”

Leslie Wagner twisted his mouth into a sardonic smile. “There's a lot of crooks around here who turn out to be honest men—after they make enough money to gag the voice of history.”

“In other words, you think that Moy Hop's news item is worth investigating?”

Leslie Wagner's mouth hardened. “I'm going to get the insurance detectives on it in ten minutes.”

“Hold the deal.” James Lee raised his hand. “Take it easy. They have been working on it a long time without any results. I'm overloaded with work, but if you don't mind I'd like to look this deal over with Moy Hop's help before you make any further moves.”

A quick enthusiasm lighted Leslie Wagner's face. “Would you do that for me? I'd rather have you on the job than a dozen of the insurance people.”

“Thank you,” James Lee smiled. “It happens to be one of my jobs. The department cuts into the case on the strength of the fingerprints on that broken plate glass in your store window. Do you remember?”

“Of course. I had forgotten about the federal angle. What was that tie-up? Do you mind telling me?”

“Narcotic case. Opium,” James Lee said briefly. “The man who broke the window of your store has room and board waiting for him through the courtesy of the government—if we can pick him up.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“You say you're an old friend of the Cuboni family?”

“Three generations of Cubonis have been our customers.”

“Good! First of all, on the strength of your friendship, borrow the

bracelet that Kenman gave Miss Cuboni. Can you do that?"

"Of course. Then what?"

"Keep it in your possession. I'll telephone you later tonight at your residence."

"What are you going to do?"

"That, my dear Mr. Wagner, is for the moment strictly my business, if you please. Now, if you will gather up these magnificent and colorful jewels I will ask you to enjoy a stirrup cup with me—and then I start to work."

A MOMENT after Wagner began to gather up the imitation jewels, "I'd like to borrow one of those magnificent diamonds," James Lee said.

"Help yourself. You can have the lot if they'll be of any service to you."

"Thank you . . . . Only this one." From the collection James Lee selected the eight-carat rectangular stone whose identity had momentarily puzzled Moy Hop. "It will be good for Moy Hop's vanity if the original of this one happens to be in Miss Cuboni's bracelet," he suggested.

"You don't want any of the rest of them?"

James Lee shook his head. "Only this one, thank you. Just a moment and I'll get something to drink. Will you have Scotch or bourbon?"

"Scotch, please."

James Lee walked to his kitchen. "Please bring in some Scotch for Mr. Wagner," he said to Lin Sung. "I'll have some sherry." Turning to Moy Hop, "If you do not have to return at once to Mr. Kenman's house, I may have some work for you to do presently."

Bowing to James Lee, "Your desires are my commands," Moy Hop said. "Who am I to question the will of heaven?"

In the same ritual, smiling at Moy Hop, "A wise man understands a nod. When Mr. Wagner departs I would consult with you on another problem. We have work to do."

In the first detail of the work to which James Lee referred was the task of obtaining from Moy Hop a series of quick biographical sketches of the personnel of Harper Kenman's house. Within twenty minutes after he had begun his inquisition James Lee had obtained Moy Hop's testimony covering the salient characteristics of Harper Kenman; Joseph Battley, the valet; Jelvik, his cook; Walter Shore, his secretary; together with an impressionistic sketch of Louise Cuboni.

"Repeat your statement relative to Battley, the valet," James Lee requested, closing his eyes, the better to impress the verbal picture of Battley on his memory.

In Cantonese, "There is something eternally mysterious about the man." Moy Hop related. "Battley, displaying usually a gentle and tranquil spirit, is at times capable of flaming into a murderous rage that makes me cringe in fear. He has worked for Kenman many years. Battley's father was an innkeeper in England. When this man died he left his son nearly forty thousand dollars, which Battley invested in some enterprise with Kenman in New York. The money was lost. In moments of drunken rage Battley swears revenge against Kenman."

"You say the man was in the British army?"

"Battley served for four years in France. In his cups he speaks of the men he killed with his bayonet in various battles."

After a moment, "Tell me again about your master's secretary."

"His name is Walter Shore. He has been with us less than three months. My master had a Javanese secretary before Mr. Shore came—a man he met in Surabaya. A man who had been educated in Holland and England."

"Where is this man now?"

"I do not know."

James Lee reached once more for the decanter of sherry that sat on his desk. He poured a glass of wine. "Good luck, long life," he said. "Seven sons to mourn at your grave. Return now to your master's house. I will follow you promptly. And remember—silence!"

AT THE doorway of James Lee's library Moy Hop made his parting obeisance. When he had gone James Lee put through a telephone call to police headquarters. “James Lee speaking,” he said; “Federal Bureau of Investigation. Let me have the fingerprint classification in the Wagner jewel robbery, prints found on broken plate glass in Wagner's window. I'll wait.”

In less than three minutes, “Here you are, Mr. Lee. Ready?”

“Quick work. Shoot.”

“All under the line—nothing on the right hand.”

“Okay.”

“Fourteen C O 15. That's all we've got.”

“I hope it's plenty. Many thanks.”

James Lee hung up the telephone and sought his servant. “I shall be gone perhaps for an hour, perhaps all night,” he said to Lin Sung.

“Do you wish me to drive your car?”

“I am taking a taxi.”

In the taxi James Lee devoted five minutes to a quick review of the layout of the Kenman house as Moy Hop had described it. A block from his destination he dismissed the taxi. Now for the first time since Moy Hop had told his story a premonition of danger altered the program of direct action that he had resolved to adopt. The weight of a .45 automatic hanging in its holster under his left armpit afforded him a comforting sense of protection. A smaller gun, a .32 revolver in the right pocket of his coat gave him an added sense of security. “It's absurd,” he mused, “to contemplate imaginative dangers—but nevertheless I am glad that I am armed.”

He pressed the button to the right of the front door of the Kenman residence. To his casual surprise the door swung open three seconds later—too promptly for his peace of mind. “I would like to see Mr. Kenman,” he said to the silent figure in the shadowed doorway. “I am James Lee of the Bureau of Investigation—the Department of Justice.”

“This man would be Battley, Kenman's valet,” Lee judged. “Tall, slim, fifty years old, bald, narrow eyes, nervous and shifty.”

“Please come in, sir,” the man said unctuously. “The master, Mr. Kenman, is at the moment in the library.”

Thirty feet down the dark hallway, passing a closed door to the left, Battley knocked softly on the panels of a door to his right. Then, without waiting for a response to his signal, “This is the library, sir,” he said, opening the heavy-paneled door to admit the visitor. In a somewhat formal voice, “Mr. James Lee,” Battley announced, and then, with unwarranted resentment in his tone, “Mr. James Lee of the bloody secret service.” Again, unctuously, “Walk in, sir. The master is probably at his desk.”

James Lee glanced sharply at the man. “Thank you. The Bureau of Investigation—not the Secret Service.”

“Right, sir. Sorry, sir. Old Battley fumbles the ball now and then, what?”

Turning his back on Battley, James Lee walked into the library. It was forty feet long and twenty feet wide. The entrance door through which he had come led into an alcove ten feet wide that opened upon the main room. Books lined the two long walls. Fronting a fireplace in the south wall there was a great carved walnut desk. At the desk, his back to the fireplace, slouched across an array of documents, in seeming slumber, sat Harper Kenman. Three paces inside the entrance to the library James Lee turned squarely to face the man. He said quietly, “Mr. Kenman?”

There was no answer.

In a louder voice, “Mr. Kenman!”

Kenman did not move.

James Lee took one step toward the inert figure and then, hesitating, he turned to summon Battley.

Before his vision ranged to the alcove of the library he felt a searing pain slash the flesh of his left forearm. An instant later the crash of a pistol shot reverberated in his ears. He reached for the gun in his coat pocket and swung around to face the source of the shot. On the instant the library lights went out. He heard Battley's voice bellowing an incoherent alarm and then, more distinctly,

“What the devil is all this? Jelvik! Mr. Shore! Mr. Shore! Come downstairs at once, sir! This outrageous detective fellow is letting off a pistol!”

There was a commotion in the rear of the house. Hurried footsteps in the hallway above.

THE lights flashed on. Battley walked bravely into the library through the alcove from the hall. Five feet behind him there followed another man. Battley called to this second man. “See, Jelvik, there he is! That's him! Take him, Jelvik! Wing him! Look out there for his pistol!” Battley glanced at his master, slumped across the desk. “On my word, I believe he's shot Mr. Kenman!”

His right arm steady against his side, James Lee leveled his weapon at the pair. “Halt where you are! Jelvik, drop that gun! Drop it! Hands up—you two!”

At the top of his voice Battley let out another yell for Walter Shore. “Take care, Mr. Shore, this murd'rous blighter is armed!”

Behind Jelvik, James Lee saw Moy Hop slide in through the door. “Moy Hop, you come here,” James Lee ordered. At this command the Chinese houseboy edged around Jelvik and Battley to approach James Lee. “Mr. Lee! You're hurt!” Moy Hop exclaimed. “See! Blood drips from your hand.”

Before James Lee replied a voice from the hallway called to Battley. “What's going on here, Battley? Who did the shooting?”

“Don't come in, Mr. Shore! Stay out, Mr. Shore! Send for the police! There's a man here shot Mr. Kenman!”

James Lee passed his .32 quickly to Moy Hop. “Hold these two men! If they move shoot them,” he commanded. He unbuttoned his vest and made a quick pull at the .45 automatic slung in its holster under his left armpit. He called to Walter Shore. “Battley is a liar! Mr. Shore, please come in here. I am police enough for the moment.” Walking to the library entrance as he spoke, James Lee faced Walter Shore in the wide hallway of Kenman's house. “I am James Lee,” he said. “Federal Bureau of Investigation. Please come in here. You're safe.”

With his .45 automatic James Lee waved Walter Shore into the

library. Following the man, a trail of blood dripped from the knuckles of Lee's clenched left hand. Seeing this, “Who shot you?” Walter Shore asked, coolly.

“I don't know—probably Jelvik there. He came into the picture waving a gun. That gun on the floor.”

“I'll fix you up if I may,” Shore said quietly. “I know first aid.”

“Just a moment,” James Lee replied. Over his shoulder, “Moy Hop, come here. . . . Closer. Hold your gun on these men while I search them. If either one moves let him have it!”

James Lee cradled the blue automatic between his wounded left arm and his body. Rapidly the skillful fingers of his right hand explored Jelvik for another weapon.

“Dat's de only gun I got, mister,” Jelvik said, midway of the search. “De one on de floor.”

James Lee looked down at the gun. He kicked it ten feet along the hardwood floor of the library. “Maybe. I'll find out,” he said. “Stand still!”

Jelvik had told the truth.

James Lee moved to where Battley stood with his hands up. On Battley's face there was suddenly a mask of insane rage. He gritted his teeth, his eyes flaming, and snarled at James Lee. “I'd like to twist a bayonet through your heart,” he grated. “Stab you neat and let you choke on your own blood.”

JAMES LEE proceeded calmly with his search. “No doubt of it,” he admitted easily. “And now—what's this!”

From Battley's right hip pocket James Lee extracted a .25 automatic. His eyes narrowed. “Not such a hell of a good marksman, are you, Battley?” he questioned. “It's excusable. These little things always shoot wild.” He slipped the gun in his own pocket. “Mr. Shore —if you don't mind I believe I'll ask you to rig a twister above my left elbow. I seem to be messing up the place with blood.”

James Lee turned to Moy Hop. “All safe now,” he said. “March these two men down by the fireplace and hold them there.”

“I ain't done nothin' to you, mister,” Jelvik protested.

“Not yet,” James Lee admitted. “Get down there and shut up!”

To Moy Hop, “Let them sit down,” Lee directed. “Far end of the room. Hold them there. If either man makes a move let him have it!”

Passing Harper Kenman, slouched across the desk, Battley averted his eyes from his employer. Jelvik, looking down at Kenman, suddenly grunted like a startled hog. “De man is stabbed!” he said thickly. “Stabbed in de back!”

In four strides Lee was at Kenman's side. He laid his hand on the man's shoulder, looking for a moment at the bronze handle of a heavy knife whose blade had been buried in Harper Kenman's heart. He shook Kenman's inert form. “This man is dead!” he announced. “Dead as hell!”

Forgetting his wounded arm, James Lee reached for the telephone. . . .

Within three minutes the siren of a police car wailed to silence in front of Kenman's residence.

James Lee spoke to Walter Shore. “Front door locked?”

“Yes, Mr. Lee.”

“Open the door. Let the police in.”

Voices in the hallway. “Here, this door to your right,” Walter Shore directed.

Two police officers came into the library. James Lee introduced himself. He pointed to the dead man. “Mr. Kenman has been murdered,” he said.

Sergeant Scott nodded toward Moy Hop. “What's that Chink doing with the gun there?” he asked.

“Working for me. . . . One of you officers take over for him, will you?” Then to Moy Hop, “Bring me a glass of water,” he said in Cantonese.

Moy Hop left the library, to return in a moment with a silver tray on which rested a glass of water. “Could I get you a glass of

wine?"

"Thank you, no." James Lee gulped his glass of water and again reached for the telephone. He called Leslie Wagner's residence. "Were you successful?" he asked when he heard Wagner's voice.

"Yes."

"Quick work. Come over to Kenman's residence right away." Lowering his voice so that no one in the room might hear, "Bring the bracelet with you," he whispered. "Get that?"

"I heard you," Wagner answered. "I'll see you in five minutes."

COINCIDENT with Leslie Wagner's arrival, Lieutenant Ward of the homicide squad and two plain-clothes men reached the Kenman residence.

Entering the library, Lieutenant Ward nodded to Sergeant Scott. Then, seeing James Lee, whose arm at the moment was being bandaged by Walter Shore, "Who got you, Mr. Lee?" he asked.

"I don't know," James Lee said.

Lieutenant Ward spoke to one of his men. "Take my car and get a surgeon over here from Emergency for Mr. Lee." Turning to James Lee, "Kenman dead?"

"He's dead," James Lee replied.

To another man. "Phone the coroner," Lieutenant Ward directed. "Then get old Hoofprints up here with his camera. . . . You got any ideas, Mr. Lee?"

Walter Shore had completed his first aid. With Shore's help James Lee got his wounded arm into the sleeve of his coat before he replied. "Yes," he said to Lieutenant Ward. With his right hand James Lee reached into his vest pocket and pulled out a slip of paper. "Fourteen C O 15," he read aloud.

"What's that?" Ward asked.

"It's the classification on the fingers of somebody's left hand—the Wagner jewel robbery. . . . Lieutenant, do you know Mr. Wagner here? He's the proprietor of the jewelry store."

“I've met Mr. Wagner,” Lieutenant Ward said.

“I'm working for him,” James Lee announced.

Ward smiled grimly. “Good luck—but what about this dead man here? What have you got on this job?”

Without replying at the moment, James Lee turned and let his slow glance range from Jelvik to Battley. He smiled significantly at Moy Hop.

Jelvik muttered an incoherent oath. Scowling sideways at the man, Battley suddenly snarled at him. “Damn your eyes, Jelvik! Hold it, you blighter!”

Now, answering Lieutenant Ward's question, “I haven't anything definite—so far.” James Lee lighted a cigarette. “I may get you something—in a few minutes.”

When the ash on his cigarette was a quarter of an inch long, James Lee reached for a sheet of note paper that lay on the desk. He flicked the cigarette ash upon this paper. For a moment with the index finger of his right hand he ground the cigarette ash into a fine powder. He folded the notepaper, collecting the ash in the grooved trough of the fold. He reached across the desk then for the silver tray on which Moy Hop had brought him the glass of water. Over a spot on the polished surface of the tray where the faint print of Moy Hop's thumb had dimmed the luster of the polished metal, he shook half of the pulverized cigarette ash. Delicately, with a silk handkerchief he brushed the cigarette ash back and forth over the thumbprint for a moment. Then, with an eight-power lens he inspected the faint pattern that the gray ash had revealed, “Fourteen,” he said half aloud.

“Old Hoofprints will be here in a few minutes, Mr. Lee,” Lieutenant Ward suggested, “He's got all the gear for that work.”

James Lee smiled at Lieutenant Ward. “Thank you,” he said. He turned the silver tray bottom up and on the faint oval areas where the brilliant silver had been dulled by three fingers of Moy Hop's left hand he shook the remains of the pulverized cigarette ash. After a concentrated inspection he put his lens back in his pocket and pushed the silver tray away from him. “Fourteen C O 15.”

To Lieutenant Ward, “You may arrest Moy Hop for the Wagner

robbery," he said. More distinctly in the turmoil of voices that suddenly filled the long room, "Bring Moy Hop over here. It is probable that he will also confess the murder of Harper Kenman."

James Lee turned quickly to Leslie Wagner. "Let me have the Cuboni bracelet, please," he said.

When Moy Hop faced James Lee, speaking Cantonese, "There is a last step to every journey," James Lee said. "You are the thief for whom we search! You killed your master! Confess!"

Moy Hop was silent. There were beads of perspiration on his brow.

"Look!" James Lee continued. He reached into his vest pocket and tossed the eight-carat rectangular paste diamond that he had borrowed from Wagner's collection on the desk in front of Moy Hop. "You boasted of your memory—but here you slipped. The original of this stone is nowhere in this bracelet. You remembered it, however, not from the bracelet—but from the other trophies of your theft."

AFTER a pause: "My master forced me to the evil deed," Moy Hop said. "First the opium that we brought in—he gave me not one cent of my share—then the jewels. And still I served in poverty."

"Where are the jewels?"

"I have them—here." From a twisted silk girdle that he wore next to his skin, Moy Hop produced the jewelry and the unset gems that he had stolen.

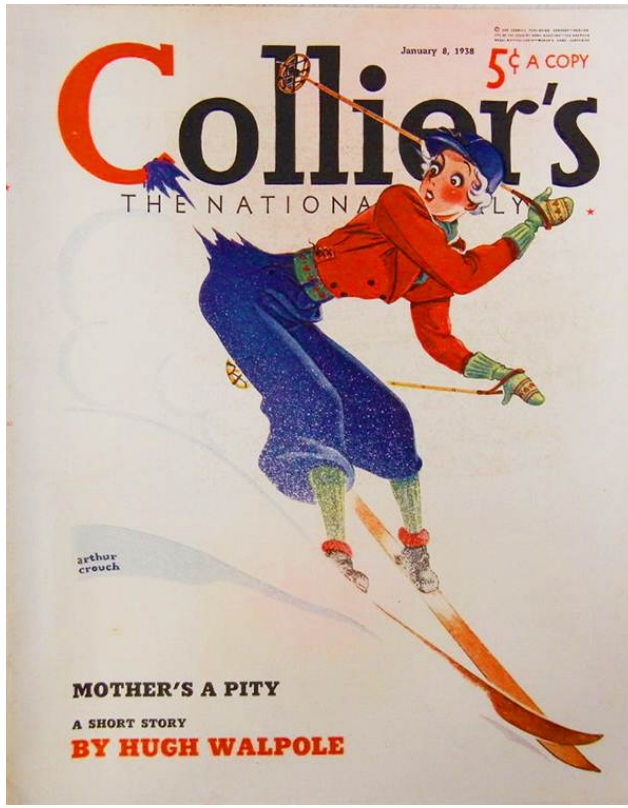
There were five seconds of silence. Then, "I killed the man," Moy Hop confessed. "He was a genius of evil enterprise, I was his humble servant."

"Right!" James Lee turned to Lieutenant Ward. "Moy Hop killed Kenman. He's ready to go with you."

Speaking pidgin, "Policee man no ketchum Moy Hop," the killer contradicted. "Moy Hop go now; stay long time." He whipped out a short-barreled .38. The first shot reached his heart. "A last step to every journey," he whispered, smiling at James Lee until the sardonic grin of death replaced his smile.

In the silence that followed the shot, “Well, damn my eyes!” Battley grated. “Mr. Lee, that murd'rous devil is prob'ly the blighter that winged you!”

James Lee nodded wearily. “No doubt of it, Battley,” he said. Then, to Lieutenant Ward, “I'm sorry. Lieutenant—my foot slipped a bit on this job.” He looked down at the dead Moy Hop. “Poor devil—perhaps he has regained the Middle Pathway.”



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Collier's, March 26, 1938

Mr. Wong:

THE BELL FROM CHINA

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

Illustrated by Irving Nurick

James Lee reads an inscription and reaches for a gun.

That Suave detective, James Lee, goes after another killer who fails to leave his card

Vera Hegardt asked, “Did you complete your translation of the inscription?”

FANG MAN was fat, and his smile was worth big money to the Gold Tiger Company. Casual customers who visited the store on Gamblers' Alley in San Francisco believed that Fang Man owned the Gold Tiger outfit. As a matter of fact, he owned three shares, of eighty, but he wore the mantle of authority in a manner that gave reason for the public's error. Most of the stock in the Gold Tiger was the common merchandise of Chinatown, but enough good stuff drifted in from China to make the place good hunting for collectors of the best things in Chinese art. Mr. Arnold Fisher, a director of the Pacific Art League, was one of Fang Man's most constant visitors. A recognized authority on design and color, Mr. Fisher's hobby was Chinese art. As a collector his activities were limited by a very modest income but he had a genius for engineering contributions to the Art League's collection and not many of the finer things that turned up in Fang Man's importations escaped him.

Wealthy old girls and boys, observing the distinguished artist's sincere conniption fits at the sight of a really fine piece of jade or bronze or pottery, would often buy it forthwith to save Mr. Fisher's life. Mr. Fisher would accept the purchase for the Art League's collection and go to dinner with his glowing patron, ushered to the door of the Gold Tiger by the beaming Fang Man and the full company of cackling clerks that staffed the pungent shop.

Eight clerks, a cashier and Fang Man. Rent and salaries. A lot of overhead—but nobody ever gave that a thought because the Gold Tiger was seemingly big enough to support ten or fifteen people, China fashion, and the public knew nothing at all about the seventy-seven shares in the enterprise that were held by Fang Man's various partners. The Gold Tiger shares were worth five thousand dollars apiece and that was something else the public did not know. The annual dividend, the division of the profits in the first days of the First Moon—but that can wait while Fang Man introduces Arnold Fisher to James Lee: “Mistah Lee—Mistah Filly-shah. Him good man.”

Fisher held out his hand. “I'm Arnold Fisher,” he said, “of the Art League.”

“I'm glad to meet you,” James Lee said. “I know your Color Harmony—good book.”

“Thank you. Are you a collector, Mr. Lee? Chinese art, I mean?”

“Him gup-ment man,” the smiling Fang explained. “Large G-man.

Good job fo' China man. Big money, him ketchum."

Lee frowned at Fang. "I have some early bronzes, and some jade," he said to Fisher. "Then there are some clay figures, too."

"Have you seen the Art League collection?"

"Yes. Some fine things there."

"Have you seen the bell and the two caldrons of the Chou Dynasty that we got last month?"

"No. I must see them."

"Perfect things!" Fisher's enthusiasm was manifest. "Magnificent stuff! The bell has a long inscription. Seventy or eighty characters. Can you translate the Chou inscriptions, Mr. Lee?"

"Without much difficulty."

"The reason I ask is that Dr. Call, of the university, is away for six months. He always does that work for us."

"No better man for the job," James Lee said. "He's the final authority."

"I'm awfully anxious to have the bell inscription worked out. Do you suppose you could find time to give us a general idea about it—date the bell, perhaps?"

"I think so. I'll be glad to try it. You know, of course, that there are fifty people in San Francisco who can work out those Chou inscriptions?"

"I know—and they'd give me fifty different translations. Some of them literally accurate, perhaps—but you will admit, Mr. Lee, that most of our local Chinese scholars are a bit vague with English."

"I understand. Sometimes it's difficult to express the essence of the Chinese mind in other languages."

"Exactly!... When do you think you can look at the bell? Work on the inscription, I mean?"

"This evening is free."

"Perfect! Will you come down to the League—or may I bring the bell to your house?"-

"My apartment is more convenient," James Lee said. "The bell probably weighs less than some of the reference books I'll use. Shall we say eight o'clock?"

“Good. I'll go down now and get the bell before the janitors lock up.”

“Here is my address,” James Lee said.

After Arnold Fisher had left, James Lee resumed his interrupted conversation with Fang Man. “I will not waste our time,” he said in Cantonese, “by offering you the lead of advice. I suggest that you spend the gold of clear-seeing to purchase right conduct. Feet leaving Middle Pathway walk to gates of prison.”

“Eyes of lion not seeing now?”

“Seeing well enough. Not blind when looking at your seven partners in Shanghai. One word to wise man better than ten thousand to fool. Word is—stop!”

Fang Man hesitated for three seconds. Blandly then, “Who am I to question the will of heaven?”

Within six hours a cablegram in code halted a shipment of opium whose sale in the United States would have meant two hundred thousand dollars for the Gold Tiger crew. Before the message reached Shanghai, James Lee was busy in his library with the difficult inscription on the bell of the Chou Dynasty that Arnold Fisher had brought in from the Art League collection.

“This is a tough one,” James Lee said, after a preliminary inspection.

“I'm afraid I've imposed on you with a bigger job than you anticipated.”

“Not at all,” James Lee protested; “I enjoy it—only it really will take considerable time. Where, by the way, did you get it?”

“Fang Man imported it. Boad Hagardt presented it to the Art League. Do you know him?”

“I don't know him,” James Lee said. “Let's see if we can find a date here.”

“It's all a puzzle to me.”

“No doubt. Here's something that may help us. Roughly 'Emperor nine moon ten seven year.' What emperor? This symbol can mean jade or king or great... four hands united.... Kung! I've got it! The emperor is Kung Wang! Now if the text describes some of *his* activities the piece can be an important find, historically. It can be terribly valuable!”

“It cost enough,” Fisher observed.

JAMES LEE frowned. “I wasn't thinking of its value in cash. What did Fang Man get for it?”

“Hagardt paid him two thousand.”

“Mr. Hagardt is a handy man for the Art League to have around. Hang onto him.”

“No fear. He's doing the hanging on. Wants to be just one of us humble seekers after beauty.”

“Beauties, maybe? There are some lovely ladies in the art classes.”

“He's all set that way. His wife is a knockout. Russian girl about half his age—with absolutely everything.”

“I'll have this bell job worked out in a week or so.” James Lee smiled. “It will be safe here.”

Arnold Fisher blinked. “Oh, yes—the bell. Take all the time you want, Mr. Lee. By the way—of course you're coming to the Four Arts affair next month? Mrs. Hagardt is to be the Chinese empress. It's Chinese this year, as you probably know.”

“Very happy to come. Your Javanese pageant last year was very colorful.”

“This Chinese affair will be ten times as beautiful. I'll see that the committee reserves a box for you and your guests. And will you let me know when you get the bell puzzle solved?”

“Surely. I'll telephone. If I find anything really startling you'll get a progress report from me. Do we wear costume—in the boxes?”

“Yes. You'll see some pearls in the show. Costumes and acts and chorus groups solid with pearls.”

“Nothing more spectacular—if it is properly lighted. Your idea?”

“Boad Hagardt sold me the pearl idea.”

AT THE doorway of James Lee's apartment Arnold Fisher halted for a moment. “If that bell really does turn out to be an exceptional piece,” he said, “maybe it would be a good idea not to let Fang Man know too much about it. He's an avaricious bird. He soaked Hagardt the full retail rate on a wholesale lot of pearl-embroidered costumes for the

royal attendants in spite of his protested friendship."

"Why didn't you side-step and try the next bazaar?"

"Hagardt was the fall guy—sort of running that part of the show because Vera—Mrs. Hagardt—is the splendiferous empress. He's buying the costumes for the big act."

"I see. Who is playing the emperor's part?"

"I am."

James Lee bowed low to his departing guest. "Your most humble subject wishes you ten thousand years of felicity. See you soon again."

Returning to his problem of the inscription on the bell, James Lee was vaguely annoyed with some undefined element of the puzzle. Through long experience he had learned to discard wishful thinking in these matters and to trust his instinct rather than superficial evidence. Half consciously, absorbed in eager anticipation of what the cryptic text might reveal, "ninth moon, seventeenth year of the Emperor Kung Wang," he repeated.

Presently, basing his preliminary opinion on several intelligible phrases, "This is a proclamation of sovereignty over a new and vast domain," he decided. "Black night forests of five-needle pines in the north to almond-blooming third moon kingdom South," he quoted. Suddenly, "Almonds!" he exclaimed. Then, in the Occidental vernacular, "Nuts!" He reached out for a dictionary on the table to his right. After a moment, "Phonetically exact transcription of the Persian term," he decided. "Chinese 'Bwa-dam,' Middle Persian 'va-dam,' Persian 'badam'—meaning nuts to you, Mr. Fisher, and Mr. Boad Hagardt, and Mr. Fang Man!"

After a moment he laid the heavy bronze bell on its side. He walked into his laboratory, which adjoined his library, and returned with a hand drill. From a bright spot on the lip of the bell where the patina had been abraded he drilled a thin spiral of bronze. "Two strikes so far. Let's see what an assay for zinc and lead will show."

The careless manner in which he swung the heavy bell from the library table to the floor was in marked contrast to the careful handling that he had given it up to that moment. He summoned his houseboy. "Lock this away in the big vault with the other junk," he directed. Then, remembering an earlier thrill that the bell had inspired, "Handle it with care," he said. "It's a good piece of work—of its kind."

The Art League ball hit a new high for beauty and color long before the formal pageantry of the court scenes of the Manchu rulers replaced the throng of costumed dancers. At midnight the floor was cleared for the March of the Emperors and a brilliant tide of Oriental splendor flowed in from the costume rooms that flanked the vast arena.

Seated on their jeweled thrones, borne high by a hundred royal servants, Arnold Fisher and Vera Hagardt, clad in shimmering costumes embroidered with gold and pearls came on to face a barrage of flashlights and to be greeted with a roaring tempest of applause from the boxes and galleries.

Under the tumult James Lee became suddenly aware of a man's voice addressing him. “I'm Boad Hagardt,” the man said. “Arnold Fisher wanted me to meet you. Splendid show, isn't it?”

“Magnificent,” James Lee agreed. “Your wife is a very beautiful empress.”

Hagardt smiled. “She is a beautiful woman. You must meet her after —after she awakens from this dream.”

“I will be very happy to meet her,” James Lee said. Abruptly then, “The bronze bell of the Chou Dynasty that you donated to the Art League collection—may I ask where you found it?”

Hagardt hesitated for a moment and then, “I picked it up in Shanghai,” he said. “I bought it from one of you* million cousins, Lee Wing Chang, at the Three Sword Shop. Do you know him?”

Reading a mild irony in Hagardt's question, James Lee smiled thinly. “There are several million members of my family whom I have not met.... May I offer you a cigarette?”

“Thank you. What do you think of the bell?”

“A very interesting piece. Fang Man imported it for you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Fisher said you bought it from Fang Man.”

Hagardt nodded. “He's right. Those shops handle the customs men more easily than I can. You know all of the tiresome routine, I suppose.”

“I know some of it.”

“Silly business, isn't it? Takes you longer to get a piece through the customhouse than it does to get it across the Pacific. Can you read those

old inscriptions, Mr. Lee?"

"With difficulty," James Lee said. And then, "I believe our heaven-born of ancient dynasties are returning to earth. Shall we try to find Fisher and your wife?"

"They will come here," Hagardt said. "Vera wants to meet you. Fisher told her you had translated the inscription on the bell. She is interested."

Within the hour James Lee had enjoyed two dances with Vera Hagardt. She was slender and her hands and feet were small. "Mixed blood in this girl's lineage," James Lee decided. Her eyes confirmed this. They were wide apart and large but a sinister fire glinted in their molten green. An aura of some exotic scent surrounded the woman.

FOLLOWING their second dance, Vera Hagardt asked, over a glass of champagne, "Did you complete your translation of the inscription on the bell?"

"Not yet," James Lee said. "I find it quite difficult."

Vera Hagardt smiled. "Sometimes they don't make sense, do they?... Won't you have a cigarette, Mr. Lee?"

"Thank you, I have one."

"Won't you try one of mine?"

From the silver cigarette case that Vera Hagardt opened, James Lee selected a cigarette. He lighted it. "This is good," he said. "The Nandyal district?" Vera nodded. "You have a very acute sense of taste. A little farther south—three or four hundred miles, I believe. Dindigul."

"You have lived there?"

"No, but Mr. Hagardt lived there a year or two."

"He exhibits excellent taste in various things," James Lee said cryptically. "Incidentally, there he is—with Mr. Fisher. May I surrender custody of the heaven-born to the emperor and his companion? I'm not really old-fashioned about my bedtime but I have a lot of work to do tomorrow."

Vera Hagardt smiled her sweetest smile. "I hope I shall see you again, Mr. Lee. I have enjoyed meeting you."

After a moment with Hagardt and Arnold Fisher, James Lee bade them good night. On his way out of the auditorium, crossing the vast arena of the dance floor whereon some hundred revelers were hard at work making merry, he saw a dozen pearls that had been torn from one of the royal costumes. He picked up four of the pearls and put them into his pocket.

In his apartment, preparing for bed, James Lee questioned his servant, a Shanghai man, about the Three Sword Shop from which the bronze bell had come. “I seem to remember that Lee Wing Chang is a man of evil.”

The servant bowed. “My master is of clear perception. For twenty years Lee Wing Chang has notoriously been associated with evil enterprise.”

“Thank you; that is all,” James Lee said, and added, “A man can dig his own grave with his tongue.”

AT ELEVEN o'clock the next day James Lee telephoned Arnold Fisher. “I'd like to see you some time this afternoon if it is convenient.”

“Any hour you name. I'll be in my studio all day.”

“Recovering from the party?”

“I'm afraid it will take more than one day,” Fisher said. “I drank too much champagne. By the way, do you know Fang Man very well?”

“Fairly well,” James Lee said. “What about him?”

“He sent a messenger up here for that emperor's costume that I wore. I'd like to keep it but the Chinese that came for it was quite insistent.”

“Did you give it to him?”

“No. I wonder if you can make some arrangement with Fang Man so I can buy it from him.”

“I thought Hagardt bought those costumes.”

“The Chinaman said that Fang Man had bought them back from Hagardt.”

“Why didn't you telephone Hagardt about it?”

“I called him but he wasn't in.”

“I'll see if I can fix it up for you. I'll see you about five o'clock in your studio. May I bring you some first aid—the hair of the dog that bit you?”

“No, thanks. I think I'll live.”

Arnold Fisher thought that he would live, but in this he was wrong. At five o'clock, when James Lee rang the bell at the door of Fisher's studio, there was no answer. He opened the door. “Hello, Fisher,” he called. “Where are you? Sleeping it off?” Then, looking down, he saw Fisher, face down on the floor back of the long couch that fronted the fireplace. Fisher was in his pajamas and he wore a voluminous dressing gown of vermilion silk. He was dead from a shot through his heart. A pool of blood lay under his chest and his body was still warm.

“Killed within the last hour,” James Lee decided. He devoted the next ten minutes to a quick examination of Fisher's studio and the other rooms of his apartment. The pearl-embroidered costume was missing. He went to the telephone then and called his office. Frank Wilbur answered him.

“James Lee speaking. Is Riley there?”

“Right here.”

“Turn the office over to Sabin or Parrish. I want you and Riley to meet me at my apartment right away.”

“Okay. Be there in five minutes.”

In his library, to Riley and Wilbur: “Arnold Fisher was murdered at his studio less than an hour ago. Director of the Pacific Art League. Wilbur, you go down in Gamblers' Alley and round up Fang Man. Hold everybody in the joint. Riley, you're coming with me. I'm making a call on Boad Hagardt and his wife. Did you see her picture in the morning papers?”

Riley nodded. “Some swell dame,” he commented. “What's the play?”

“You and I will go to Hagardt's house in my car. Wilbur, you'd better get some help on your Fang Man job. In about half an hour tell one of the cops to notify the homicide squad that Fisher is dead in his studio. I didn't report the murder because I need a little time on the Hagardt angle.”

“Do we hold Fang Man on a murder charge?” Frank Wilbur asked.

“I'm not sure yet,” James Lee said. “One of Fang Man's crew may

have shot Fisher. Ask the coroner not to touch Fisher's body until I get another look at it."

"Okay. Is that all?"

"That's all. Hop to it!"

James Lee opened the upper left-hand drawer of his library desk. From an open cardboard box he selected two of the four pearls that he had found on the dance floor at the Art League ball. He handed one of these to Riley. "Come into the shop," he said. "Try this in a test tube with strong nitric acid. If she comes orange-red and changes to yellow we've got something."

In his laboratory James Lee laid the second pearl in a concave disk of glass. He mixed three cubic centimeters of strong sulphuric acid with a forty-percent formaldehyde solution and submerged the pearl in the mixture. A purple-red coloration resulted which presently changed to violet and then to blue.

"We have something!" he said to Riley. "What happened with the nitric acid?"

"Look," Riley said. "Orange-red. Just what have we got?"

"We have a hot trail. Are you wearing your guns?"

"Only a small automatic."

"Get a big one from the desk in the library. Upper right-hand drawer. Come along."

In the car, en route to Boad Hagardt's house, "Give me three minutes and then follow me in," James Lee directed. "Blast your way in if you have to. Three minutes, no more, no less."

"Okay," Riley said, "three minutes."

James Lee stopped his car a block from Boad Hagardt's house. The front door was opened ten seconds after James Lee rang the bell. Boad Hagardt himself bowed to his visitor.

"How do you do, Mr. Lee? Come in. How are you?"

"Quite well, thank you," James Lee said; "just a bit nervous."

"Not enough sleep last night?"

"Plenty of sleep. I'm a bit nervous about that gun in your right coat packet. Or is it a gun?"

INSTANTLY the lines about Boad Hagardt's mouth deepened. “Yes, it's a gun,” he grated. “What about it? Come in here.” Boad Hagardt's scowl changed to a sneer. “Come in and meet the family.”

“Thank you,” James Lee said. “I'd be very happy to see Mrs. Hagardt.”

Hagardt called over his shoulder to his wife, “Vera! Your Chink friend wants to see you. Are you receiving?”

From the living room, twenty feet down the hall, Vera Hagardt answered her husband: “If it's Mr. James Lee by any chance I'd be delighted to meet him.”

“Get in there.” Hagardt emphasized his order with an arrested gesture of the pistol in his right coat pocket.

James Lee walked down the hallway to the door of the living room. He paused a moment in the doorway, bowing to Vera Hagardt. “So happy to see you,” he said.

“The same to you,” the woman said, lapsing into a vernacular and a manner in strong contrast to her regal demeanor of the previous night. “You've got your nerve coming to this house.”

“Possibly.” James Lee smiled. “I see you've changed your shoes.”

“What do you mean?”

“Listen, Vera, frisk that guy,” Hagardt interposed. “I've got him covered.”

“Excuse me for being so personal, Mr. Lee,” Vera Hagardt said, hauling a forty-five automatic out of a holster against her guest's right hip pocket. “What do you mean about my shoes?” The woman laid the pistol on a table that stood in the center of the living room.

“The ones with the yellow clay on them. The yellow clay from the telephone company's conduit trench in front of your house. You left a bit of it on the rug in Arnold Fisher's studio this afternoon—and does your scalp hurt you? The little wound made by one of Fisher's fingernails? Eight or ten of your auburn hairs are missing. I'm afraid they won't grow back. You were careless, too, with the ashes from your cigarette. You might just as well have left your card. That Indian tobacco. The ash is so high in potassium chloride that it is unmistakable. And that exotic perfume you use—why did you kill Fisher?”

WHILE James Lee spoke, fear, then absolute wide-eyed horror, replaced the thin mask of contempt on Vera Hagardt's face. She turned to her husband.

"Bump him, now. Bump him! Don't let him talk that way to me," she cried.

Boad Hagardt nodded. "I'll bump him soon enough. I'll bump you, Lee—and you'll go into the bay tonight feet first. What the hell are you messing into my game for?"

"That's my business," James Lee said easily. "Bump and be damned, Hagardt! You lose either way. Patron of the arts! Donor of bronze bells! Almonds in the reign of Kung Wang! You fool—almonds weren't known in China for five hundred years after that emperor died. Seventeenth year of the emperor's reign. Not a trace of zinc or lead. Even the alloy was phony. Too bad you had it cast in Wing Chang's shop across the street from the biggest morphine factory in South China. Neighbors! Pearls! You stood to make half a million on this job, didn't you, Hagardt? A hundred coats, embroidered solid with pearls. Two or three million morphine pills! You stood to make some big dough. Slick trick, but you didn't get away with it."

"Don't kid yourself," Hagardt snarled; "we'll get away with it! We'll get away with you, too, like we got away with Fisher. Put that in your pipe and drag deep! How'd you like to have a couple of those pills right now?"

"I have a couple of them left, thank you," James Lee said. "I've used two of them in test tubes. They're morphine. Your wife killed poor Fisher because he blocked your game by holding out one coat!"

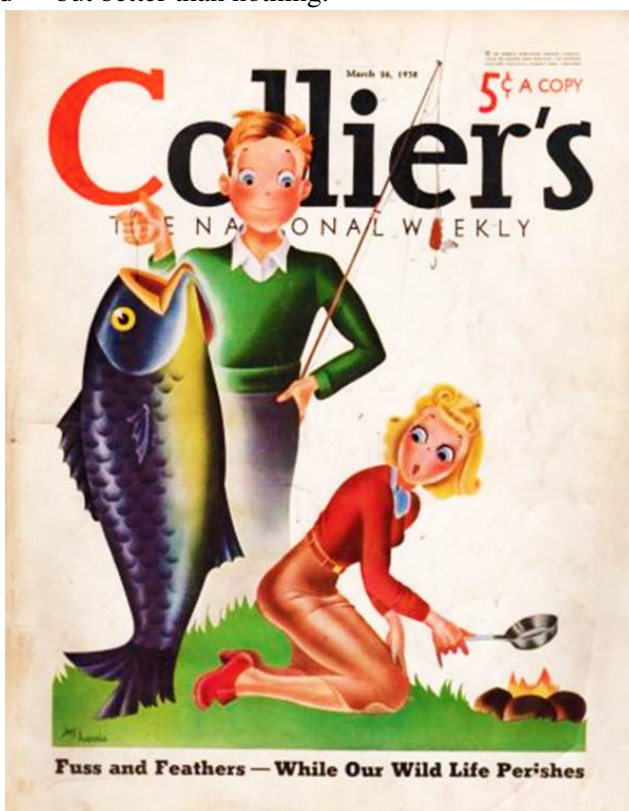
"What of it? The dope's in circulation and you're out of the picture. Not quite out but you're on your way. Fang Man said you were a slick Chink. You're slick, all right!"

The crash of a pistol shot echoed down the hallway from where Riley had fired his forty-five through the lock on the front door. Boad Hagardt turned toward the door of the living room. From where he stood James Lee leaped for the gun that lay on the table. His right hand slashed down and closed on the gun. In the next second he fired twice at Hagardt.

The first shot ripped through Hagardt's throat. The second one, superfluous, got the falling man through the heart. Hagardt was dead

when he hit the floor. By the time Riley came through the door James Lee had swung his weapon in a line direct for Vera Hagardt's heart. “Get the links on that woman,” he said. “Here! Here's another pair. Clip her ankles.... Thanks. Now get on the phone and tell the police department that we have caught a couple of killers. Hop to it. I want to get down and see how Wilbur came out with the Fang Man mob.”

James Lee turned to Vera Hagardt. He lighted a cigarette for the woman and handed it to her. “Not your favorite Indian tobacco,” he suggested—“but better than nothing.”



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Collier's, June 25, 1938

Mr. Wong:

THE FEAST OF KALI

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

illustrated by Irving Nurick

James Lee, uninvited guest page 20

"Death rides this land," Chew Lim telephoned. "My master is in deadly peril. You must help me." And James Lee, master detective, took the danger trail once again

ON MONDAY after Denman Hale had paid him his July wages, old Chew Lim decided to enjoy a night out. Over the weekend the big house on Hale Island had been the scene of high-pressure festivities and now that his master's guests had gone Chew Lim was fed up with the whirl of California hospitality.

"Why fo' allee time you ketchum too many people you' house?" he complained, parking the currency that Denman Hale dealt out to him. "Mo' bettah Sabbaday, Sumday you set down sleepum lilly bit. Too large whoopee bad pidgin."

"Lissen, you desiccated old mummy, the whoopee business is my main dish," Hale announced. "Here, pay Tony this hundred bucks. . .and sixty for Bong Yut. I'm going to Stockton."

"You suppeh Stockton?"

"Yep, I suppose Stockton."

"Ai, no good! Stockton you dlink too muchee olo-fashion whiskee, play too many poker all night."

"Wrong again, you cackling conscience! I'm going to Stockton to make a deal with Pete Roncalo to fatten forty thousand lambs here on the island instead of starving them in the mountains."

"Where you makee lamb fat?"

“I'm going to run that mob of raghead Hindus out of that thousand-acre tract of sugar beets and plant it to Ladino clover. I win on that bet two for one—get rid of the rag-heads, get rid of the beets, and cash big on the lambs.”

Old Chew Lim approved of this. “Good pidgin,” he admitted. “Where you eat suppeh?”

Reading the Oriental mind, “I'm not going near the club,” Hale said. “I'm having dinner with Pete and some of his Basque pals at Zaragoza's place—and it's too bad you can't cook as well as that Basque.”

“Pah, he cookum too muchee pepper, eprything led hot.... Tonight I go see my cousin.”

“Fair enough, but stay clear of Sang Hop's outfit. You go aboard of that ark boat and Sang Hop's gang would clean you in ten minutes.”

“I savvy him.” This with a finality that indicated a perfect immunity to the temptations of the wine and women and song purveyed by the notorious Sang Hop on board the Seaborn Heaven.

In the early evening, after Denman Hale had left for his meeting with Pete Roncalo, Chew Lim ate his supper with Tony Parente, the Hale gardener, and Bong Yut, the house-boy. After the meal was eaten he changed from his white uniform to a roomy gray suit that his master had discarded for O.D. in '17.

In this, with a flat-rimmed black sombrero riding his ears and with a corrugated pair of size-twelve black shoes on his number seven feet, he set out for China Camp on Beaver Island, five miles to the north, where Fish River marked the boundary of his master's land.

Halfway along his march, at the elbow in China Channel where Jordan Slough branched to the west, he scowled at the lighted windows of the Seaborn Heaven moored beneath the willows that fringed the south levee of Bent Island. Guitar music and the babble of a dozen tongues, laughter and the guttural supplication of the dice owner in a crap game, the strident clanking of a sick piano, and the clear, recurrent bells of three harmonizing cash registers. “Ai, tonight Sang Hop suffers no lack of victims.... Heaven is generous

with this year's crop of fools!”

“The priest of Siva! The goddess Kali is feasting on a victim the priest provides!” James Lee exclaimed. “The priest is Lakman Singh,” Sardar announced

CHEW LIM’S opinion of the evil Sang Hop and his Seaborn Heaven was tempered with an easy tolerance not shared by his master. To Denham Hale, Chinese ark boats with their crooked women, their crooked gambling and their crooked hooch, were important contributors to his labor problems. They had functioned constructively, perhaps, through an earlier epoch when the army of laborers in the Delta had been recruited from the Chinese, but after the advent of companies of Japanese, Hindus, Mexicans and Filipinos the Seaborn Heaven and all similar craft at once became breeding spots of trouble—incubators of drunkenness, disease, violence and criminal enterprise ranging from minor racial conflicts to black murder.

“Ark boats be damned” was one of Denman Hale's more gentle generalities. Specifically with reference to Sang Hop and the proximate Seaborn Heaven, he had more than once deplored the rules and regulations that prohibited direct action in protecting his army of laborers. He had contemplated gunfire and arson and dynamite, but he had weakened under the white man's burden to where vituperative phrases and the lagging servants of the law, working with subsidized reluctance, were his only weapons.

Chew Lim, scowling at the Seaborn Heaven, turned his back on temptation and pursued his course to China Camp. Three miles of it, and then at Fish River he hailed his countrymen across the narrow channel. “Hola! The boatman!”

A voice, presently, in Cantonese, “Who calls?”

“Chew Lim. Make haste. I am weary.”

IN THE dim interior of the main shack of China Camp, swamping his fatigue under generous splashes of potent black wine, Chew Lim relaxed and indulged himself in a gratifying exchange of garrulous gossip.

In the rosy glow of the warming wine, “We, my countrymen, are about to enjoy once more the smile of Milo Fo,” he predicted. “Good years, plenteous blessings, the favor of Kwan Yin, will soon replace the barren deserts that we have known.”

A chorus of skeptics answered him. “The vapors of strong drink cloud thy perception.”

“I speak with reason,” Chew Lim protested. “This day my master, who is prominent and powerful in this province, has ruled in our favor in two important instances. First of all, he has decided that men of China, sons of the Central Glory, will replace the despised laborers of India in the broad fields of his domain. In the second place he has decided to destroy our enemy, Sang Hop, his Seaborn Heaven and the evil robbers who infest the craft.... In the annals of our lives there are auspicious events. Hola! Let us drink to this great man whom I serve!”

Within the hour the evil Sang Hop, on board the Seaborn Heaven, had received a report of old Chew Lim's announcement.

Smiling blandly as he paid the informer with a handful of silver coins, “A stone lion does not fear the rain,” Sang Hop observed. “I must put an end to these annoying attentions from the great Denman Hale.”

Old Chew Lim had talked too much. Before midnight his announcement of Denman Hale's plans had been relayed to various interested proprietors of the underworld throughout the Delta and in Stockton.

WHEN Denman Hale said good night to Pete Roncalo and various other Basques in Zaragoza's restaurant in Stockton, he started for his car, which was parked seventy feet from the entrance of the restaurant. Before he had covered half the distance two turbaned figures stepped to the sidewalk from the driver's seat of a dilapidated black touring car. They were beside Hale in three

seconds. In the darkness one of the men raised his hand to launch a looped cord around Hale's throat.

The victim gave one futile gasp for air before consciousness left him. As he fell, one of the turbaned figures caught him and a moment later he was bundled into the tonneau of the touring car.

Old Chew Lim assuredly had talked too much. Ignorant of his error, still pleasantly inspired by the wine he had enjoyed in China Camp, Chew Lim halted at Jordan Slough on his return journey to Hale's house and again observed the lighted windows of the Seaborn Heaven. A pipe of good black opium, the hazard of a dollar or two at one of Sang Hop's fan-tan tables—why not? Momentary diversion, temporary freedom from the heavy burden of unceasing labor. Kwan Yin might smile upon the resourceful man, small fortune be the reward of action. If the dragon of chance devoured a bit of hard money, what of it?

At midnight, with a heavy purse and a light heart, Chew Lim edged into the packed throng at a fan-tan table, mumbled a prayer to Milo Fo, and risked the first dollar on a losing bet.

The rim of the world to the east was gray when Chew Lim stumbled ashore and resumed his return journey along the willow-fringed levee toward Denman Hale's house. His stomach burned with the acid dregs of raw wine, his flaming eyes were being ground to pulp against the serrated perimeter of a rotating earthquake that rumbled and screeched inside his skull, his tongue was a clacking cinder in the seething lava that lined his throat—and his purse was empty.

Southward along China Channel for two miles and then the level rays of the sun struck through his quivering eyelids with a fire that seemed to ignite his brain. For relief he kept his tortured eyes turned toward the quenching shadows under the drooping willows to his right. The little wavelets of the tidal current refreshed him with their insistent theme of desert springs. His eyes widened to the grateful shade and for a moment he was tempted to roll down the bank for a plunge into the cooling water.

Then, twenty feet below him, crumpled against the trunk of a willow tree, he saw the body of a man. The man's sightless eyes stared up at the shading leaves, and his swollen lips stretched wide

in a grimace of death about his clenched teeth.

At the shock of discovery old Chew Lim whined softly for a moment under the lash of his nerves. After a while, by the force of his weakened will, he looked down once more at the dead man. Now, sure of the man's identity, he trembled at the realization of the grave portent of the tragedy. “Sang Hop was quick to strike!” Forthwith, in haste to quit the scene, he resumed his flight to sanctuary, ambling along the rutted roadway on the levee, in a palsy of fear, shaking in terror at a premonition of disasters yet to come.

It was nearly six when Chew Lim reached his master's house. He made his way at once to Denman Hale's bedroom. He knocked on the door, and again, more loudly, but there was no answering voice. Before he opened the door he knew with an absolute certainty that Denman Hale was not in the room. He entered the room. A quick inspection revealed no evidence that Denman Hale had returned from his supper engagement in Stockton with Pete Roncalo.

For a moment, “My fears for my master are groundless,” he reflected. “I am the victim of my own senseless visionings.” He remembered the dead man under the willows, and forthwith his fears were renewed. He knew that all the formal agencies of the law were powerless to halt the murder crew. With an inspiration born of his desperate need he thought of his countryman James Lee. “He is skilled in combat with the evil creatures of the white man's world. He knows the minds and methods of the criminal lords of the Central Glory. He alone can win against the killers that Sang Hop employs.... At this late moment he alone may save my master's life!”

He walked to the telephone at the head of Denman Hale's bed. The instrument trembled in his hands, but presently the call went through to James Lee in San Francisco. Abruptly after he had spoken his name, “Death rides this land,” Chew Lim said, speaking his native Cantonese dialect. “Sang Hop's men have killed Lai Gulam, who rules the men of India for my master. It means that my master is in deadly peril. You must help me.”

In his apartment in San Francisco, James Lee hesitated for five seconds. He made a quick summary of the official duties that filled the program of his day. Then, realizing the gravity of Chew Lim's

statement, “I will come to you at once,” he said. “Wait for me at your master's house. Until then, silence.”

DENMAN HALE regained consciousness in a dilapidated frame house in Stockton to which his captors had conveyed him. His hands were bound behind him with a length of the cord with which his captors had strangled him. He discovered that his ankles were bound so tightly that all sensation had left his feet. A wad of cotton cloth had been stuffed into his mouth. His face lay against the moist earth floor of the room.

A faint light filled the room. The air of the place was foul with the moldy odor of wet earth mingled with the sickening fumes of heavy incense.

The prostrate man became vaguely aware, presently, of some activity behind him. He realized that two men were digging a pit in the earthen floor of the place. He attempted to move his head so that he might observe the scene, but he was too weak. He heard one of the men speak a dozen words of a Hindu jargon.

“We must dig the pit deeper,” the man said. “Large bodies require deep graves.”

A film of darkness veiled Denman Hale's eyes as merciful unconsciousness returned.

When James Lee's car roared across the bridge that spanned China Channel, Chew Lim met him.

“Get in,” Lee said. “Which way?”

“To the northwest, about two miles from here along the levee road.”

“Did you know the dead man?”

“I knew him well. His name is Lai Gulam. He and Sardar Lan have ruled my master's Hindu crews for ten years.”

“Why do you think Sang Hop had him killed?”

“Because this dead Lai Gulam and his mate, Sardar Lan, have opposed Sang Hop for many years.”

“Why was the dead man so far from his camp?”

“I cannot say. He may have visited the Seaborn Heaven to rescue some of his countrymen from Sang Hop's hands. Many of these India men smoke opium.”

“You have used opium there?”

“At various times,” Chew Lim confessed.

“Last night?”

“Aye, five or six pipes.”

“The color?”

“Not black—red and rotten with dust that choked me with its smoke.”

“A man creates his own hell,” James Lee observed.

AT THE scene of the murder James Lee devoted ten minutes to his examination of the dead man. Then, absorbed in a complex series of problems that had developed with his discoveries of various elements of evidence, he turned and made his way up the sloping face of the embankment, inspecting every foot of the ground. Ending where Lai Gulam lay, the track of the dragged corpse was plainly visible. Where this track left the roadway on top of the levee James Lee halted. Directly before him in the motor road an oil-blackened area of dirt half as large as a man's hand claimed his attention. “The car stopped there.” Four feet south of the oiled spot the ground was marked with a small crater formed by the impact of rust-stained water that had fallen from the leaking radiator. Near this lay the crushed body of a butterfly. Still attached to this, their orange and yellow markings brilliant against the brown earth, were two of the insect's wings. Four feet from the butterfly, toward the water side of the levee, James Lee found the stub of a brown-paper cigarette.

He picked this up and lighted it, inhaling two mouthfuls of the smoke. He threw the burning stub of the cigarette away and walked toward his car. To Chew Lim, abruptly, “Where is the companion of the dead Lai Gulam—the other foreman of the Hindu laborers, Sardar Lan?”

“He is probably working in the sugar beets along the north boundary of my master's land, six miles ahead.”

James Lee started the car. He opened up to a perilous sixty.

Beyond the turn the rough roadway eastward along Fish River slowed their progress for two miles, and then, “There are the Hindu laborers,” Chew Lim announced, lifting a trembling hand toward the broad field to the right. “The man with the stick—the bearded man with the black turban—that is Sardar Lan.”

The siren on James Lee's car howled a brief note. Sardar Lan looked at the car for a moment and started across the field toward it.

“What you want?” he asked when he came up.

“Lai Gulam is dead,” James Lee said.

Sardar Lan's eyes grew terrified.

“Who would kill Lai Gulam—with this?” From the pocket of his coat James Lee hauled out a six-foot length of brown, bloodstained cord. “See, the strangler's knot! Who hated Lai Gulam? Hindu man? India man? Sikh, not pray Mohammed like you? Maybe pray to Siva. Maybe Vishnu. Maybe...”

Interrupting, “I know what better do,” Sardar Lan suggested. “You see Hindu priest of Siva temple. You ask him.”

“Get into the car.”

Racing back along the route toward Denman Hale's house, Chew Lim cast a questioning look at James Lee as they passed the Seaborn Heaven in Jordan Slough. “You are not attempting the capture of Sang Hop?”

“Not now.”

“But he killed Lai Gulam and my master may be his prisoner—tortured—at this moment.”

“That may be. I think not.”

DENMAN HALE at the moment lay face down on the dank earth floor of the Siva temple. He alternated now through varying periods of consciousness. After a more complete returning to life he became vaguely aware of a subdued, droning chant, intoned by a robed figure in a thronelike chair. The chant ended and the recital of some ritual of devotion began. Hale filled his lungs with air that seemed to burn his swollen throat. He tried with his tongue to eject

the cotton rag that filled his mouth. Failing, he whined in impotent rage.

The voice of the clacking priest was silent. Two turbaned men picked Hale up. They carried him to a narrow six-foot pit that they had dug in the earth floor and lowered him into it, feet first. His flexed legs could not support him and he slumped down until his head was a foot below the surface of the floor.

The priest of Siva resumed his chanting, voicing his devotion in hypnotic monotones barely audible to the half-conscious victim in the earthen pit.

After a little while Hale felt a cascading stream of rice grains falling upon his bowed head....

ON THE smooth highway, speeding toward Stockton at eighty miles an hour James Lee questioned Sardar Lan. “The Siva temple —who will be there now? What priests?”

“There will be Lakman Singh very sure. Always him. Also maybe strong man priest name Gadar.”

“And Basanty Lai?”

Sardar Lan's eyes widened with astonishment. “You know before these bad men?”

“No, but I have ears.” James Lee passed a loaded .38 revolver to Sardar Lan. “Which way now to the temple of Siva?”

“Five streets more,” Sardar Lan said.

Half a block from his objective James Lee stopped the car. Old Chew Lim got out with Lee. “I go with you,” he said.

“You would better remain here.”

“I go with you,” Chew Lim repeated in Cantonese. “Three are better than two if there is conflict.”

“Come ahead.”

Sardar Lan was fifty feet in advance. He turned in through the gate of a dilapidated frame house thirty feet back from the sidewalk. At the gate James Lee heard Sardar speak in Hindustani to someone

inside the house. “Follow quickly,” Lee said to old Chew Lim. “Sardar speaks to one of the men we seek.”

In ten steps, with Chew Lim behind him, Lee was at Sardar's side. “They say not open door,” Sardar whispered.

“Gadar Singh? Basanty Lai?”

Sardar nodded. “Yes. Both man.”

Without a moment's hesitation James Lee pulled a .45 automatic from its holster under his left armpit and fired a shot through the lock on the door. “Now!” he said to Sardar. “Kick it in! Break it down!”

Sardar lunged at the door. It gave way with the second impact of his shoulder. James Lee walked over it into a long hallway that ran the full length of the house. There were three doors opening from this hallway on the right, two on the left. “Break into those three rooms!” he said to Sardar Lan. “And be on your guard!”

The two rooms to the left were empty. As Sardar opened the door of the middle room James Lee turned to the one at the end of the hall.

“No man here,” Sardar called.

At that moment from the rear of the house James Lee heard a man's voice raised in a howl of pain, and under it a continuous cackle of Cantonese. “Old Chew has something!” But now there was no time for Chew Lim's affair, for from the opening door of the last room a blast of gunfire greeted James Lee. He felt the splintering panels of the door hitting against his chest, and the heavy air was suddenly acrid with the fumes of black powder. He dodged to the left, firing low at the shrouded figure of a man inside the room. There followed a groan of pain and a man's voice snarling invectives in guttural Hindustani.

ON THE instant Sardar Lan was at James Lee's side. “It is Basanty Lai,” he said. “Let me go first.”

Sardar dived through the door, his .38 ready for action, but Basanty Lai was out of the fight, writhing in pain on the dirt floor of the room. Sardar kicked his prostrate enemy. “Paying now with blood,” he announced to James Lee. “He choke many other man

dead without blood. Pay now with blood."

"Never mind that! Look! Quick!" In the half light of the room James Lee swung Sardar Lan around to face a seated figure, inert in a great chair, facing a gilded idol on a throne against the west wall of the room. "The priest of Siva! The goddess Kali is feasting on a victim the priest provides!"

"The priest is Lakman Singh," Sardar announced.

Between the gilded image of Siva and the inert priest, from a great brass bowl, suspended by three iron chains from an ebony tripod, a thin stream of rice grains fell, like the sand in an hourglass, into a circular pit in the dirt floor of the room. Seeing this, Sardar's eyes widened in horror. "The feast of Kali!"

He leaped to the rice-filled pit in the earthen floor and buried his hands in the cone of rice that had fallen from the brass bowl.

In three seconds, scooping out the rice with his cupped hands, "My master!" Sardar exclaimed.

James Lee with a glance at the inert figure of the priest, fell to the aid of Sardar Lan. A moment's work revealed Denman Hale's head. "He is net dead," James Lee announced. "He is breathing."

When the pair could reach Hale's armpits they hauled him upward.

"This man was twice near death," James Lee said to Sardar Lan. "Bring some cold water now. He is returning to life. And ask Chew Lim to..."

The siren of a patrol interrupted him. A moment later four police officers came into the room. "What's the shooting?" the first one asked. "What's going on in here?"

"I'm responsible," James Lee answered. "This is a federal job. My name is Lee. That man on the floor, and that opium sleeper in the chair—you can hold them for murder. Lend a hand here with this man, will you? He's Denman Hale—the Siva crew almost got him. One of you men telephone the sheriff to round up Sang Hop and his gang on the ark boat."

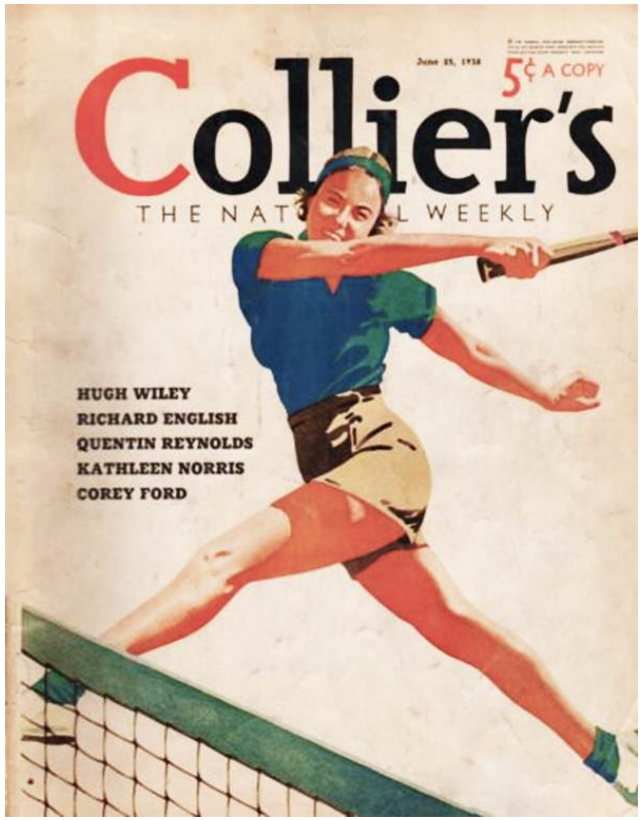
When two of the police officers had taken over the task of reviving Denman Hale, James Lee made a quick search for old

Chew Lim. He found him on guard over the inert form of Gadar Singh. There was a noose of clothesline around Gadar's neck. “Mebbe choke him too much plenty allee same fashion him killum eprybody,” Chew Lim explained in a loud voice, hoping the world might hear. In Cantonese, to James Lee, his voice trembling in anticipation of disaster, “My master—he met death?”

“He lives!” James Lee answered. “He had not quite finished the Feast of Kali that the Siva men prepared for him.”

AN HOUR later, to Denman Hale, “I had to guess fast,” James Lee confessed. “We knew that a lot of Indian opium was coming in. Old Chew Lim said Sang Hop's opium was red and dirty with dust. That's India stuff.... The cord that killed Lai Gulam—the lay of the strands, the long red fibers, the strangler's knot—obviously of India, probably a Siva-worshiping gang of thugs. The cigarette, typically Agra Chumbul leaf. Then the dead butterfly that had dropped from the radiator of Basanty Lai's car. The Indian opium has been coming into California from Nevada towns east of the Sierra. The butterfly was a mountain swallowtail—*Papilio indra,* and an imported stranger in this Delta country. Various other leads—but why bore you? Mostly guesswork. Ounce of brains and a ton of luck, that's the secret.”

Denman Hale rubbed a gentle finger over the livid scars on his neck. “Luck be damned!” he said. “I needed more than luck when you stormed in. I ran plumb out of luck late last night. A ton of brains! I'll tell the world. Boy, here's to you!”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THE HEART OF KWAN YIN

by Hugh Wiley

Illustrated by Irving Nurick

A broken statue reveals a fabulous treasure—and the secret of a murder

James Lee finds an emerald—and a killer

James Lee grabbed the sergeant's arm and swung him to sanctuary out of range

THE proprietor of the Japanese store greeted James Lee with a thin smile. "I am sorry, Mr. Lee," purred Sakasama, 'Taut the two Chinese manuscripts are sold to Mr. Frank Clayton."

"I was afraid of that." James Lee surveyed the dusky, incense-laden store. Without bitterness: "The average man has no chance to compete with a millionaire collector like Clayton."

"I could not refuse his offer," the Japanese said apologetically. "But now that you are here, Mr. Lee, I should like your opinion on another matter. Will you please to come to my office?"

In Sakasama's office at the rear of the store, James Lee saw on a desk the broken fragments of a baked clay statue. The statue's

surface was black; the interior was gray, with flashes of mica. Lee picked up the fractured pedestal, on which an inscription had been cut in the clay.

Sakasama looked inquiringly at James Lee: “What does it say?”

“It's a statue of Kwan Yin, of course. A modem piece, from the King Chen potteries up from Nanchang. But this is no way to treat a goddess, Sakasama. You must have broken her to pieces with a hammer!”

“The first two characters, there on the base, mean 'Kwan Yin.' That I know. But the four characters below are strange to me. Please to read them'“

“Nothing very startling. 'Infinite Mercy. Heart. Peace. Plenty.' Inscribed in modem mandarin form. Why do you look so disappointed to hear this?”

The Japanese smiled uneasily. “It is nothing. Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Lee. You must go?”

Outside on the sidewalk, Lee nodded a farewell to Sakasama and glanced up the busy street in San Francisco's Chinatown. He regarded for a moment the familiar window of the Chang Lin Bazaar, next door to Sakasama's shop, and then crossed Gamblers Alley.

ON THE opposite comer of the alley, in front of the Double Blessings Pawnshop, he encountered a hurrying couple. Arm in arm with a tall, red-faced American man was a lovely Chinese girl in a smart afternoon frock.

“This is a pleasure. Miss Chang!” Lee exclaimed. “And Mr. Clajrton, too!”

The couple paused abruptly, and Helen Chang offered James Lee her hand.

“I am so happy to see you, Mr. Lee! For five days you have not visited our shop!”

“I regret that until now I have not had the pleasure of wishing you happiness on your coming marriage. Sung Mock is one of the finest young men I know. He is to be congratulated.”

Frank Clayton, who had been standing impatiently at Helen Chang's side, now broke in roughly: “Hello, Lee! Miss Chang has just been looking at those two old Chinese manuscripts, and some of the Scythian pieces in my collection in my apartment.”

“You are fortunate to have obtained those manuscripts, Clayton,” returned James Lee. “The Tun-huang writings are among the greatest treasures of Chinese art.”

“I'll get a lot more treasures before I'm through!” Clajrton boasted. He smiled at the girl beside him. “I usually get what I go after.”

Helen Chang bit her lip. “Mr. Clayton's collection is very interesting,” she said. “Thank you for your kind wishes, Mr. Lee. Now we must hurry. My brother will be angry, I am afraid, because I was tempted to stay so long away from the Bazaar.”

“Goodby, Lee! You'll see me again soon!” Clayton said.

James Lee was to see Frank Clayton very soon; but he was never again to see Clayton alive.

THE summons came near midnight. The telephone in James Lee's apartment rang insistently. Over the wire came the girl's voice. Firmly but with a cold undercurrent of fear, “Mr. Lee, you must save him!” she began. “The police are here in the store. They are insane! They will have Sung Mock in his coffin!”

“Is it Miss Chang? What has happened to Sung Mock?”

“Just because he was the first to see the body—” The girl paused, making a desperate effort to regain her composure, to speak clearly and with courage. “Poor Mr. Clayton! Someone killed him here in our store. The police have arrested my brother and Sung Mock. You must talk to the white police! Sung Mock is in great danger!”

“Clayton murdered! I will come,” Lee promised. “I will be with you in ten minutes.”

James Lee strapped a .45 automatic under his left arm and started at once, on foot, toward Gamblers Alley. The fog hung chill and dank in the malodorous byways of Chinatown. At the door of the Chang Lin Bazaar he hesitated for a moment. A police car was

drawn up at the curb. Next door, a dim light glowed in the recesses of Sakasama's store.

Lee knocked on the paneled door of Chang Lin's shop.

The driver of a dilapidated touring car parked across the street in front of the Double Pigeon jewelry store started his engine. The engine backfired for several seconds. Sharply above this din, James Lee heard the echoing slap of a pistol shot.

Shards of a pane of yellow glass in the paneled door of the Chang Lin Bazaar fell tinkling at his feet. The door opened. He faced Sergeant Roper of the homicide squad. The sergeant, a veteran of the force, confronted James Lee with a drawn revolver. “Halt where you are!” he ordered.

“Get inside, you fool!” James Lee commanded. “They're shooting from—”

THE second crack of a gun from the basement entrance of the Gold Prize Lottery across the fog-swept street accented his words. A second pistol bullet whined through the open doorway, six inches above James Lee's head.

“Come in,” Sergeant Roper grated. “Stay here while I get that punk that's bangin' away at us.”

James Lee grabbed the sergeant's arm and swung him to sanctuary out of range. Over Roper's shoulder he saw Helen Chang. “Somebody listened in on your message to me.” he commented.

Sergeant Roper kicked the door shut. “I'll find out where that shot came from!” he exploded. “You wait right here while I go look.”

“Don't be a fool,” Lee advised. “By now that gunman is hidden where your whole police force couldn't reach him.” He turned to Helen Chang: “Where are your brother and Sung Mock?”

“The police lieutenant has them locked in the office. They are handcuffed. This man will not let me speak to them.”

James Lee smiled encouragingly at the white-faced girl, and pushed his way into the office of the Bazaar.

Inside the little room, Lee saw Chang Lin, Helen's elder brother,

sitting on a bench, manacled to the young clerk, Sung Mock. They blinked uneasily in the glow of a desk lamp whose shade was fixed to cast a blinding glare on their faces. Behind the lamp stood Lieutenant Conway of the homicide squad.

Conway frowned at the intruder. “What do you want, Lee?”

“Just a bystander. Lieutenant,” said Lee pleasantly. “Miss Chang told me there was some trouble, and I offered to help her. Do you mind if I stay and listen a moment?”

“Stay and be damned! Sung Mock has as good as confessed to the crime already.”

The younger Chinese stirred. “I have admitted nothing of the kind, Mr. Lee. I am innocent. I went to the stockroom at eleven o'clock to put away some bronzes from our latest shipment. Then I found Mr. Clayton's body on the floor, and called Chang Lin, who telephoned the police. That is all I know.”

“You hated Clayton, didn't you?” demanded the lieutenant. “Didn't you admit just now that you were jealous of Clayton because of his interest in Miss Chang? That you resented her visit to Clayton's apartment this afternoon?”

SUNG MOCK looked appealingly at James Lee. “I love Helen. We were to be married in two weeks. Her visit to Mr. Clayton's apartment was to examine his collection of Scythian art.”

“Was Scythian art her only reason for visiting him?” Conway taunted. “You're sure you didn't threaten to kill Clayton when he came in here at five o'clock with your sweetheart?”

“I said nothing to him. He—”

“Just a moment,” James Lee intervened.

“Lieutenant, when was Clayton killed? How was he killed?”

“The coroner said he was killed this evening between five o'clock and six. The store was closed a little after six. Chang Lin here claims that they all went upstairs, thinking that Clayton had gone away. If you ask me, that story won't stand up five minutes!”

James Lee lit a cigarette. “Who was in the store between five and six?”

Chang Lin cleared his throat. “Two or three tourists,” he said slowly. “They left a little after five. Sakasama came in after that, looking for a mandarin robe. He had a customer in his store who wanted a Chinese robe.”

“Did Sakasama see Clayton?”

“Possibly. I do not know.”

Sung Mock raised his head. “You forget another person who was here. Chin Hok was in to pay his rent shortly after five o'clock.”

James Lee faced Chang Lin. “Chin Hok, the pawnbroker across the alley? Do you own the pawnshop too?”

“Yes. All this was part of my father's property. Before the fire, there was a large old building on this site, a gambling house. Sakasama's store and this place and the pawnshop were evil dens in those days. It is said that there were tunnels below here, connecting these houses. I do not know. There is a trap door in our storeroom, but underneath it is a floor of bricks.”

“Where else could an invader gain entrance to this place?”

Chang Lin shrugged. “There is a balcony that runs under the second floor windows in the back wall. But the three of us. and my servants, were on that floor all evening.”

“A thief could have come in that way!” declared Sung Mock. “It was a thief who did this thing. The windows have thin bars, it is true; but a robber might have broken in."

"Enough of this!" barked Lieutenant Conway. "Roper looked at all the windows. No sign of a burglar. Now, we're taking you two down to the station to get the real dope. Come along!"

James Lee nodded briefly. "I'll stay here, if you don't mind, and talk to Roper."

After Conway and his prisoners had departed, James Lee brought Helen Chang into the office. He spoke to her reassuringly. Then, in company with Sergeant Roper, he walked toward the back of the shop to inspect the body of Frank Clayton.

"Don't mess things up, now!" warned the policeman as they passed through a curtained doorway arching beneath the mezzanine floor. "A blind man can see what happened."

THE storeroom, lighted by a hundred-watt bulb suspended from the ceiling, was pungent with the mingled scents of coal oil and packing straw. Various unopened cases stood piled about the place. Smaller ones, received in a recent shipment from China, were ranged along three heavy tables that stood against the south wall of the room. On the floor, face down, fronting the central table, lay the body of Frank Clayton. His skull had been smashed above his left ear, and clotted blood covered the left side of his face.

Lee surveyed the body. "What was the weapon?" he demanded. "What did the killer use?"

"We don't know yet," said Roper. "Maybe a club or a hammer. The only thing we found around on the floor was this hunk of rock. Looks like a piece of a Chink statue."

He pointed to an object near Clayton's outflung right foot.

Lee picked up the fractured base of a baked-clay statue. The surface of the clay was black, but the fractured area was a deep gray where an admixture of crystalline silica tempered the mass.

"Kwan Yin again!" Lee exclaimed. "A piece of the pedestal. This inscription is very interesting, Sergeant. The last four characters are not easy to translate."

"All that Chink writin' is Greek to me," growled Roper. "What has that got to do with the crime?"

"It may have everything to do with the crime. Look. These are a transcript of the four characters Mo Lo Kie To, in the Buddhist form, corresponding to the Sanskrit *Marakata.* They come from the seventeenth-century Tsu Mu Lu, which in turn is taken from the Persian *Zumurrud*—emerald!"

"So what?"

James Lee restrained his enthusiasm for the moment. "Never mind. I'll keep this bit of clay for a while, if you don't mind."

He slipped the fragment into his pocket, and bent again over the body of Clayton. He examined the dead man's left hand. It lay, palm down, against the floor. "What did the coroner say about those tiny bruises on the back of Clayton's hand?"

"He didn't say nothin' to me. What about them?"

James Lee pointed to a semicircular pattern of tiny bluish dots imprinted on the flesh of Clayton's hand. "Eight small bruises. There should have been nine, but one is missing. I must be on my way."

The sergeant scratched his head.

"Where you goin' now?"

"If anyone wants me, tell them I can be found next door, at Sakasama's place. Look after Miss Chang. There is a killer loose!"

Leaving the Chang Lin Bazaar, instead of seeking Sakasama, James Lee crossed Gamblers Alley and entered the Last Friend Pawnshop, where he found the proprietor. Chin Hok, seemingly half asleep behind the counter.

Greeting the old man, "Long life, great wealth," James Lee said in Cantonese.

Chin Hok blinked his watery eyes at James Lee. Then: "Seven sons to mourn at your grave. My house is honored by your presence."

To the point: "You paid your rent to Chang Lin this evening?"

Chin Hok nodded his reply.

"A white man lies dead on the floor of the little stockroom. You saw him?"

"My business with Chang Lin took me only to his office."

"The dead man's name is Frank Clayton. Did you know him?"

"Yes, he was often in Chang Lin's store."

"Who might have reason for killing Clayton?"

Chin Hok was silent for a moment, and then, "Perhaps Chang Lin himself," he said blandly. "It would have been worth his while."

"What do you mean?"

"You know of Chang Lin's obligation to the American?"

"I know nothing about it," Lee answered.

"Business has been bad for Chang Lin," Chin Hok declared. "So bad that several times he has pressed me for the small money that I pay him for the rent of these premises. Saving face, Chang Lin has borrowed from his various friends. He lives beyond his means. After the New Year, when he failed to pay his debts, his countrymen denied him further aid."

"Do you mean that Clayton lent him money?"

"Ten thousand dollars the first time, five thousand more three months ago."

James Lee bowed. "Receive my gratitude for your information," he said.

"Good evening."

From the Last Friend Pawnshop, James Lee proceeded to Sakasama's store. Five seconds after Lee knocked at the boarded door, a question came in the voice of the Japanese proprietor: "Who is there?"

"It is your friend James Lee."

Sakasama opened the door. "I expected you," he said.

"You know of the affair in Chang Lin's place?"

"Yes. Shall we go into my office?"

FOR the second time that day, James •'• Lee entered the little office. On the desk still lay the shattered clay statue that he had examined some hours before. James Lee sat down, lit a cigarette, and from his pocket pulled the fragment of baked clay that had been found beside Clayton's body.

The Japanese started back in alarm, as his glance fell on the inscription in the Buddhist characters. "It is the one!" he exclaimed. "You have found it—the Green Moon, the finest emerald of the Manchu court!"

"I have not found the emerald," James Lee said. "But now I think I know why Clayton was killed."

Sakasama fingered the broken clay fragment with trembling hands. "I have spent a year searching for the Green Moon! One of General Komaki's of ficers looted it from the Nanking treasury. Later he was robbed of it by Chinese thugs. They killed this officer. My agents in China advised me two months ago that the emerald was to be sent into this country concealed in a clay statue of Kwan Yin that would bear this inscription. Now you have found this statue! You are a lucky man."

"I have not found the emerald," James Lee repeated. "But you have confirmed my theory regarding its recent history. Who else shares this information with you?"

"I thought it was my secret. But some of the Chinese thugs may have—" Sakasama stared at the desk for a moment. Then, with a puzzled air: "What kind of a watch do you carry, Mr. Lee? Certainly not a cheap one."

In the silence of the room, James Lee heard distinctly the ticking of a clock mechanism. "What do you mean?"

"Quickly! Search your coat pockets! It is an old trick!"

In the left-hand pocket of his coat, James Lee's exploring fingers discovered a thin metal box. Calmly he pulled it forth and set it on the desk in front of him. "Yes, it is ticking—"

"Give it to me! I will get rid of it!" Sakasama exclaimed. "Hurry! Not explosive, but very dangerous. Cyanide and acid! Safe in rain barrel at back door." Cackling a crescendo of venomous epithets in Japanese. Sakasama jerked open the rear door of his office and dived into the obscurity of a hallway that led to his kitchen.

He returned presently to where James Lee waited. "The thing is harmless now. Our ears have probably saved our lives. This gas bomb is the favorite method of a devil who dwells not far from here. Three killings by hydrocyanic gas have been credited to him. He is the pawnbroker—"

James Lee stood up. "I have learned enough," he said. "I think I can now find Clayton's killer—and the Green Moon."

"Let me go with you!" the Japanese implored. "You walk into great danger of death!"

"You can help me in another way. Telephone to Lieutenant

Conway at police headquarters. Ask him to bring his prisoners at once to the office of the Chang Lin Bazaar. Then come yourself to the Bazaar."

JAMES LEE left Sakasama's store and hastened once more to the pawnshop of Chin Hok. Entering the doorway from Gamblers Alley, he drew his automatic.

Chin Hok, back of the counter, was smoking a two-foot bamboo tobacco pipe. The stem of the pipe was a heavy six-inch tube of white jade.

Anticipating desperate resistance, James Lee swung his gun up into line with Chin Hok's heart. On the instant, without speaking. Chin Hok, as a fencer might slap a rapier at his adversary's wrist, slashed down with his pipe. The heavy jade stem broke across James Lee's wrist; the automatic dropped from his paralyzed hand.

He leaped across the counter and seized Chin Hok by the throat. In the dim light he saw the yellow face go pale, then purple. When Chin Hok's body was limp, James Lee slipped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists. "A venomous snake, but Kwan Yin still smiles upon me!"

With practiced skill, James Lee searched the unconscious Chin Hok. He scowled grimly as his glance fell upon the nails in the heel of the pawnbroker's worn right shoe. Behind the counter he began rummaging among the nondescript junk that lay beneath it. In a rice basket half filled with rubbish, he found what he sought. "The broken statue of Kwan Yin!"

He slipped the jagged length of baked black clay into his pocket. As he did so, the pawnbroker opened his eyes.

Chin Hok glared at his captor.

"Killer," James Lee said, "the gates of hell are opening for you." He took the broken statue of Kwan Yin from his pocket. "Look at this!" He pointed to a bloodstain on the clay. "Your victim's blood. And here—look closely—a wisp of hair and a shred of flesh from the white man's head! The nails in the heel of your right shoe crushed down on Clayton's hand before his heart had stopped beating. You killed the man. Confess!"

Chin Hok's gaze had been fixed on the broken statue of Kwan Yin. Observing this, James Lee's eyes narrowed with a quick realization of the reason for Chin Hok's interest. "The Green Moon! I know everything. Make haste!" he demanded. "There is a last step to every journey through life. Confess!"

WITH the handcuffed Chin Hok beside him, James Lee entered the little office of the Chang Lin Bazaar. He smiled at Helen Chang and her brother and Sung Mock. He faced Lieutenant Conway.

"Here is the man who killed Frank Clayton," he said. "He's a bad actor. He tried to shoot me earlier tonight; he slipped a cyanide bomb into my pocket half an hour ago. He is your prisoner. He has confessed to the murder."

Lieutenant Conway scowled. "Chin Hok the killer? I don't get it."

"He was playing a game for big stakes. Clayton's life, mine, a dozen lives meant nothing. If he won the game, the Green Moon was his prize."

"The Green Moon?"

"One of the world's famous emeralds," James Lee explained. "One of the most distinguished jewels in the imperial treasury. Here, look at this!"

James Lee showed Lieutenant Conway the broken statue of Kwan Yin. "Stained with Clayton's blood. And here—plaster of Paris filling a cavity in the statue."

From its concealing matrix gleamed an area of the great emerald.

"Chin Hok's associates in Nanking turned the trick. They hid the Green Moon in this clay statue of Kwan Yin and, for greater safety, shipped it to this Bazaar. Chin Hok had constant access to the stockroom. Clayton was examining the statue when Chin Hok found him, and with the statue Chin Hok smashed Clayton over the head. On the back of Clayton's hand you will find the imprint of the nails in the heel of Chin Hok's right shoe."

"That's enough," Lieutenant Conway said. He turned to Chin Hok. "You killed Clayton?"

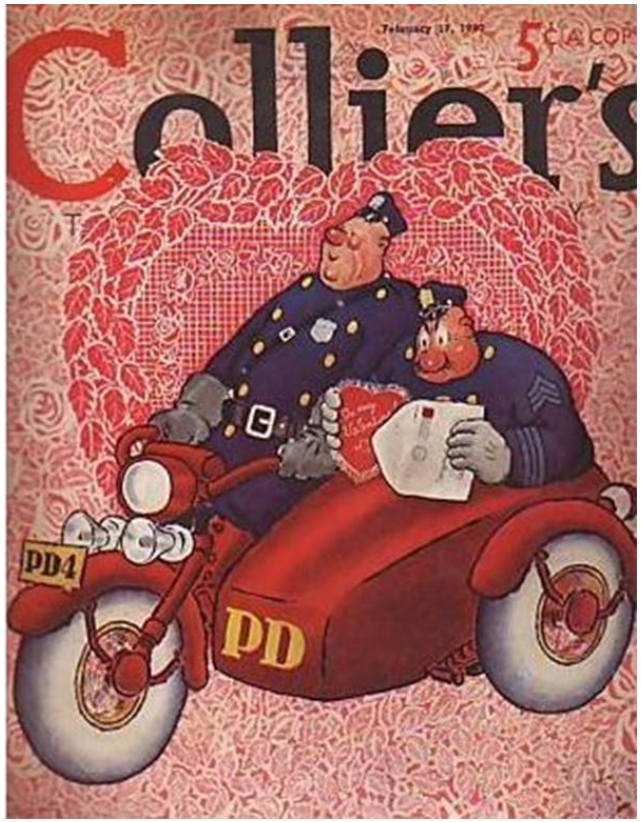
"I killed him," Chin Hok confessed, "My eyes were blinded with greed."

LIEUTENANT CONWAY turned to his two captives. "I'm sorry about this," he said. He held out his hand to Chang Lin. Gruffly, "My mistake." To Sung Mock, "You're lucky in having James Lee for your friend."

Tears had suddenly blinded Helen Chang's eyes.

"This is no time for weeping," James Lee suggested. He picked up the fragment of Kwan Yin's statue and cracked it sharply across the desk. "Look at this! The heart of Kwan Yin!"

He handed the plaster-encrusted emerald to Helen Chang. "The goddess of Mercy has given you a wedding present," he said. "The Green Moon, one of the great jewels of the Manchu throne. It is yours, and it will bring you happiness!"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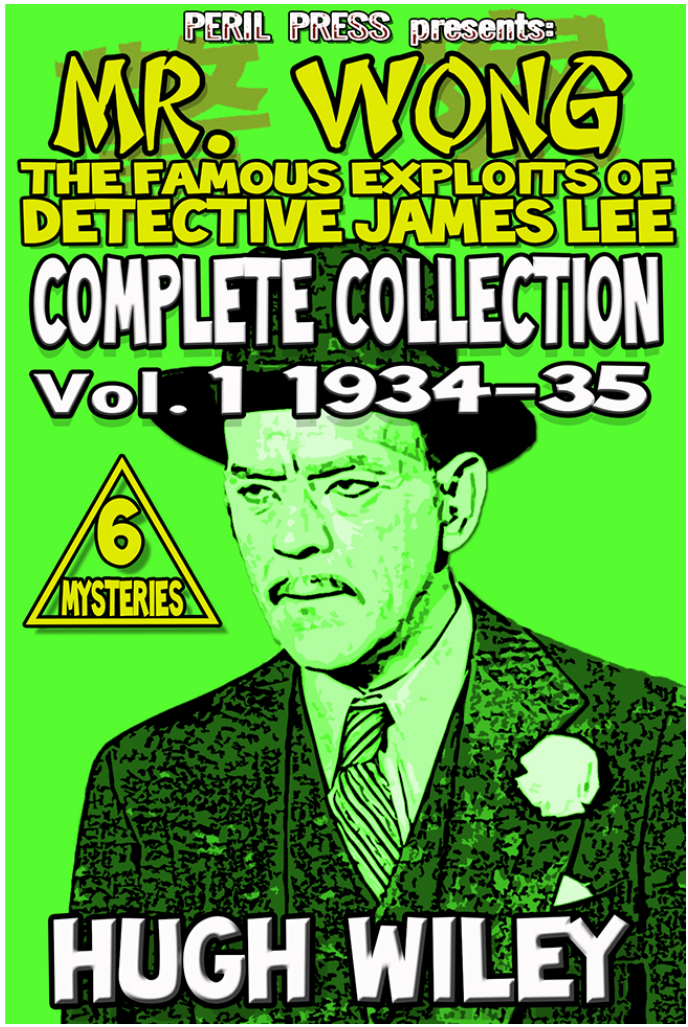

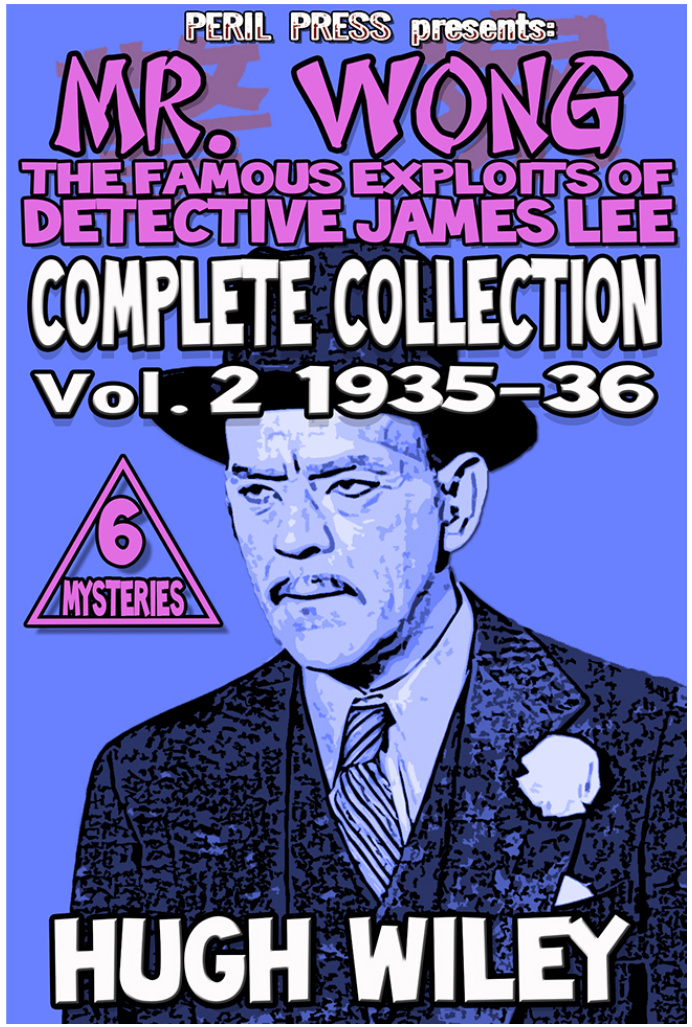
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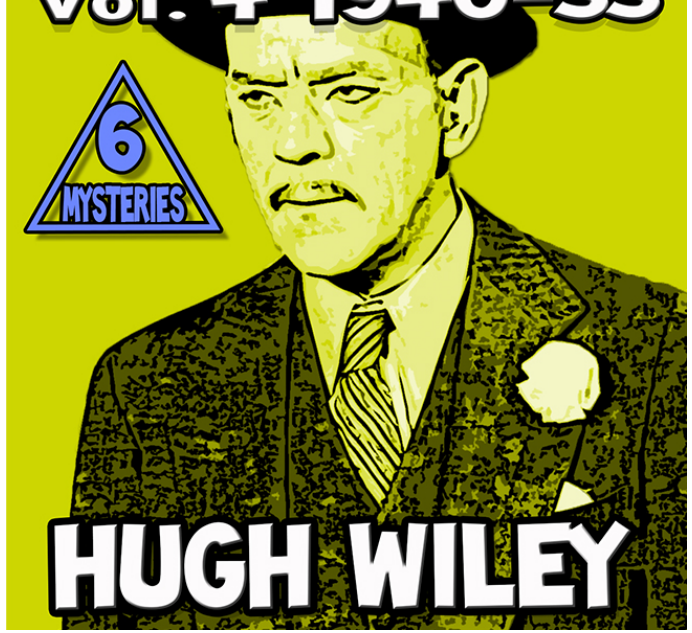

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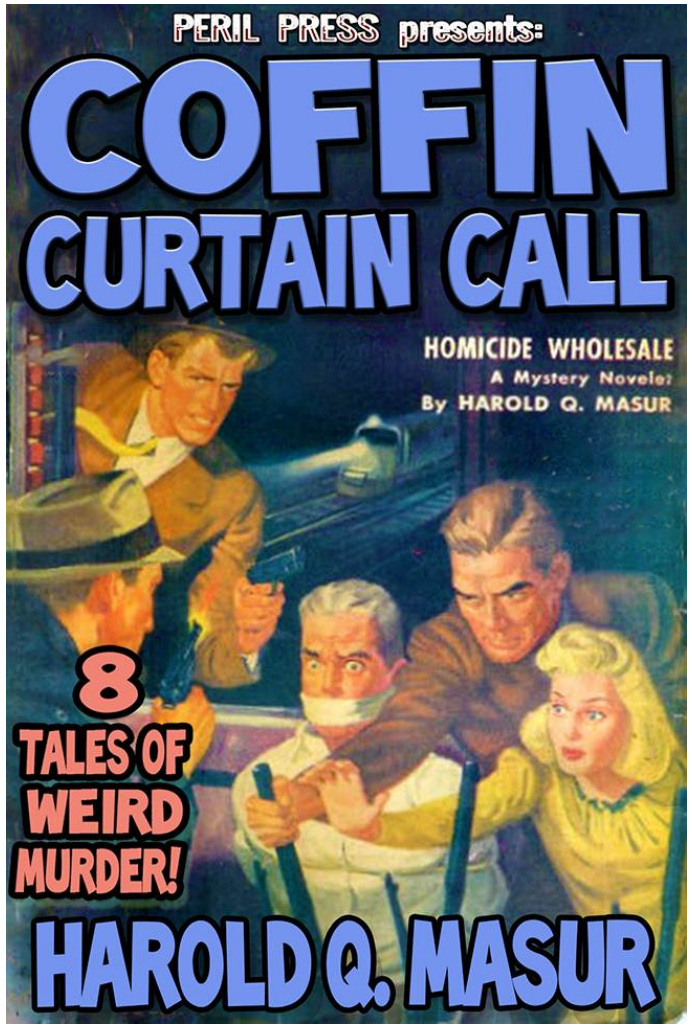
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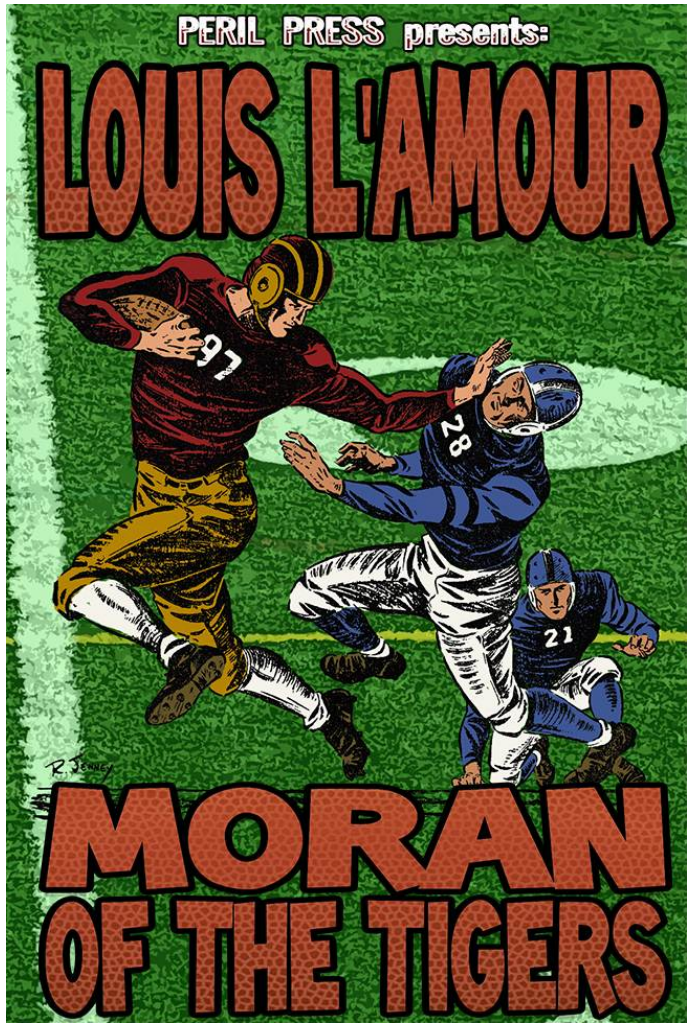
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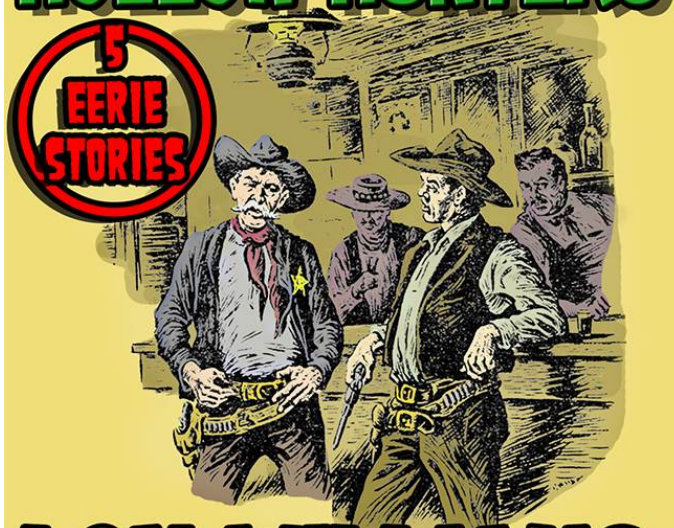

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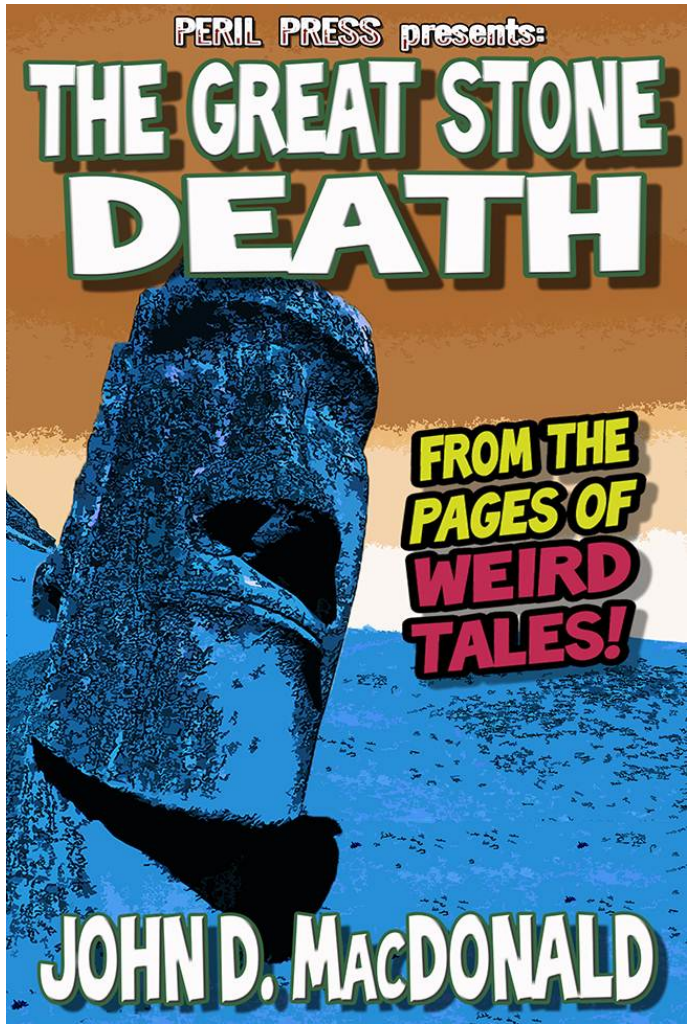
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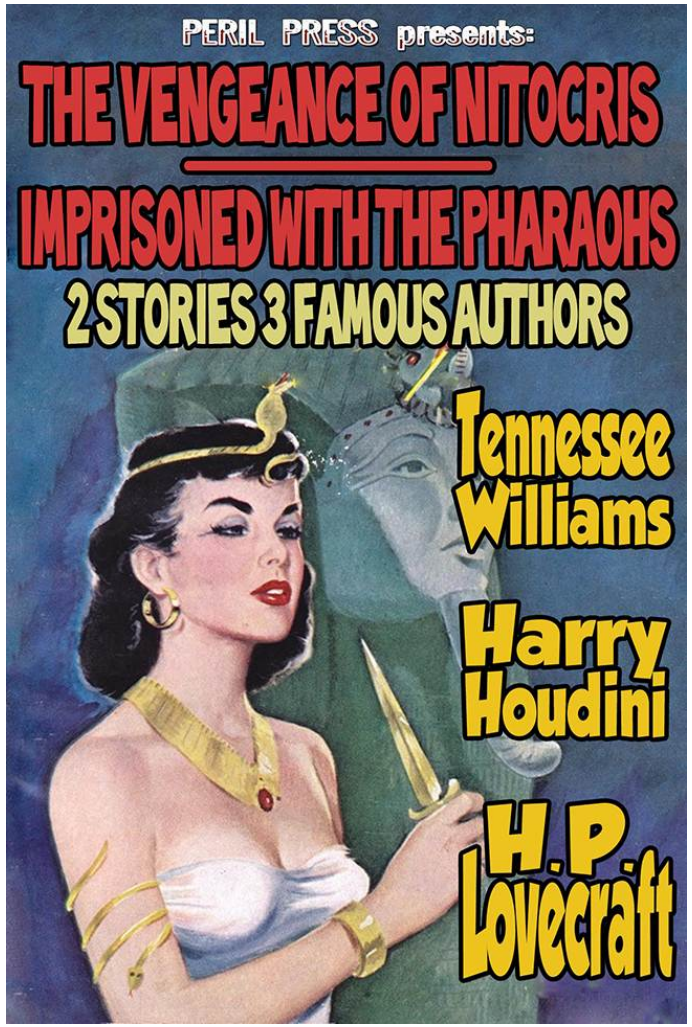
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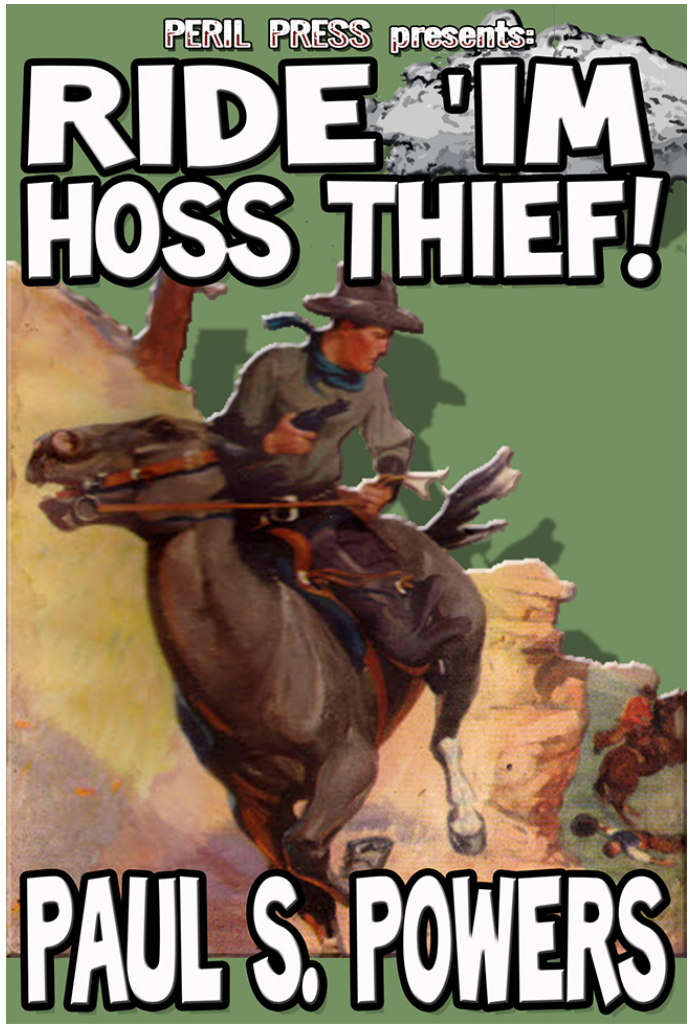
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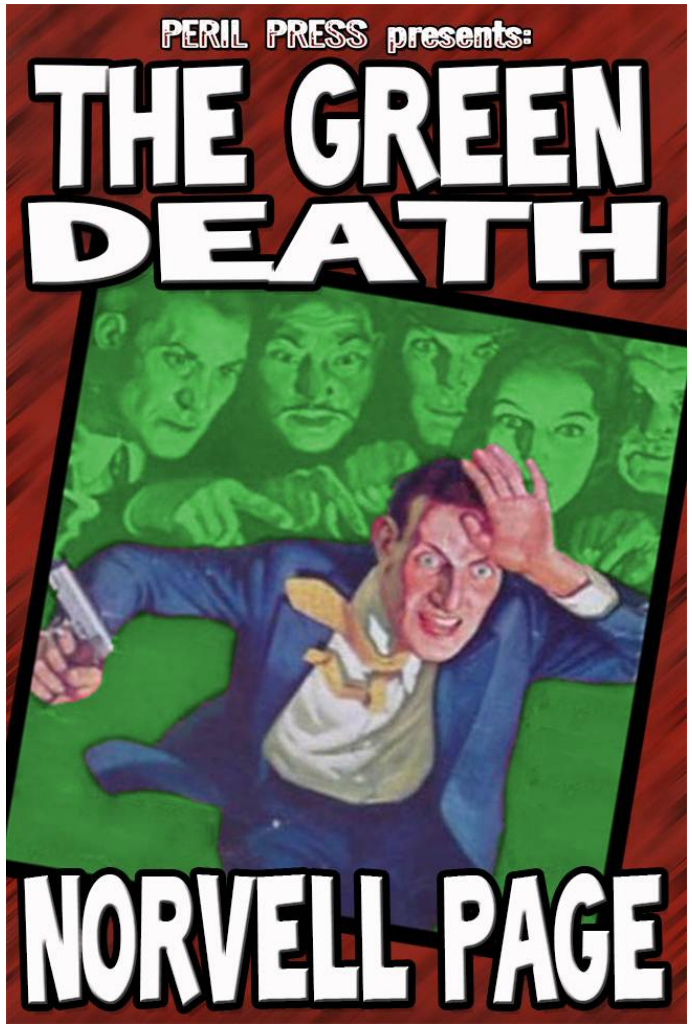
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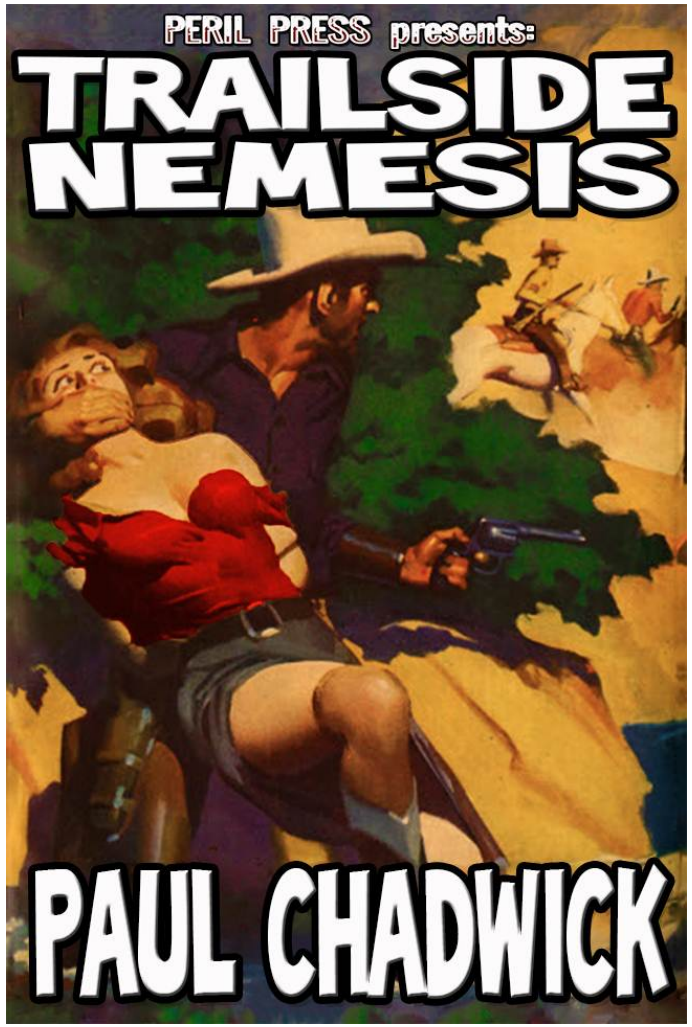
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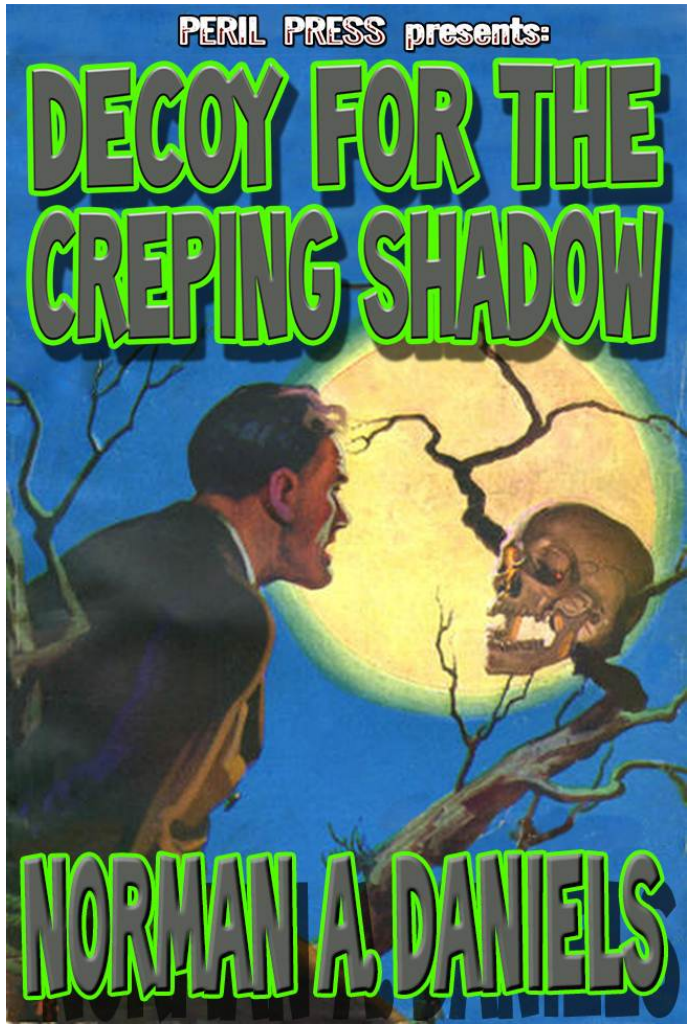
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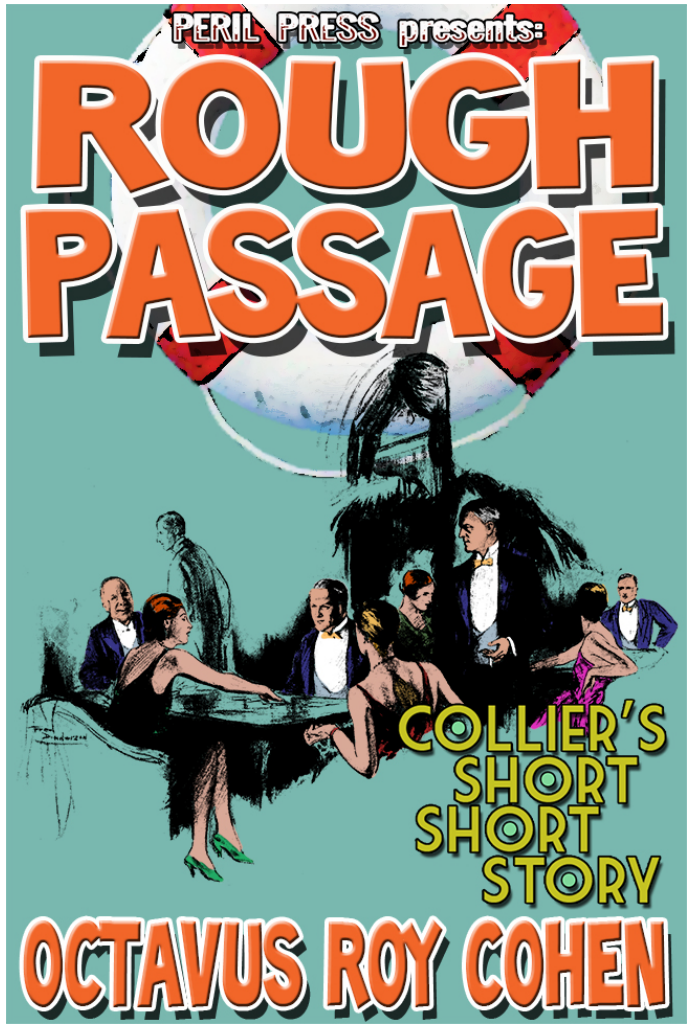
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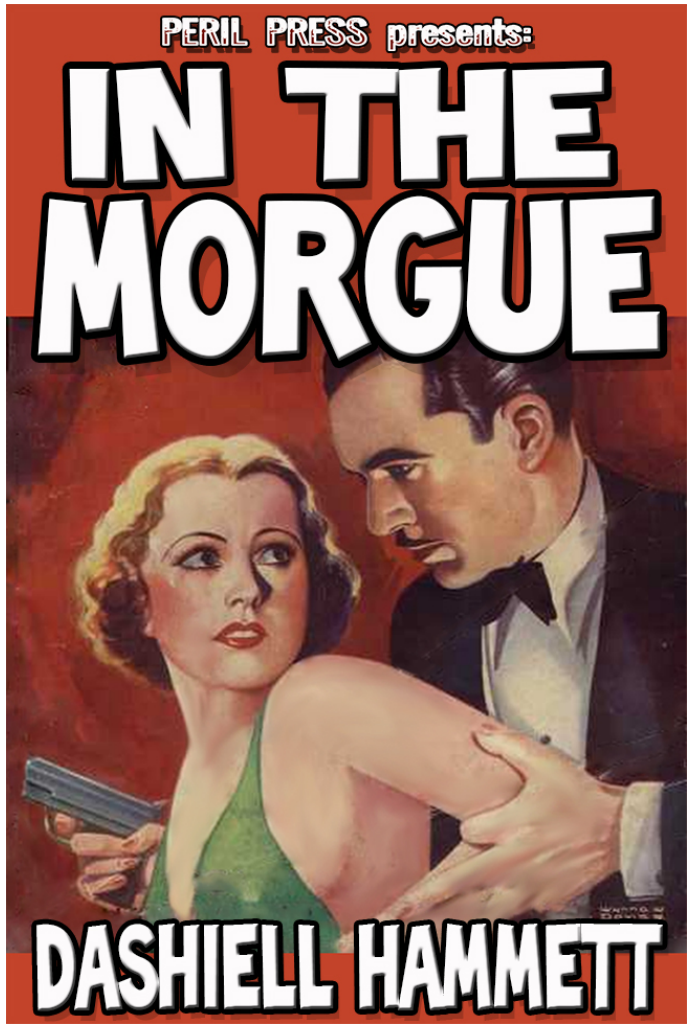
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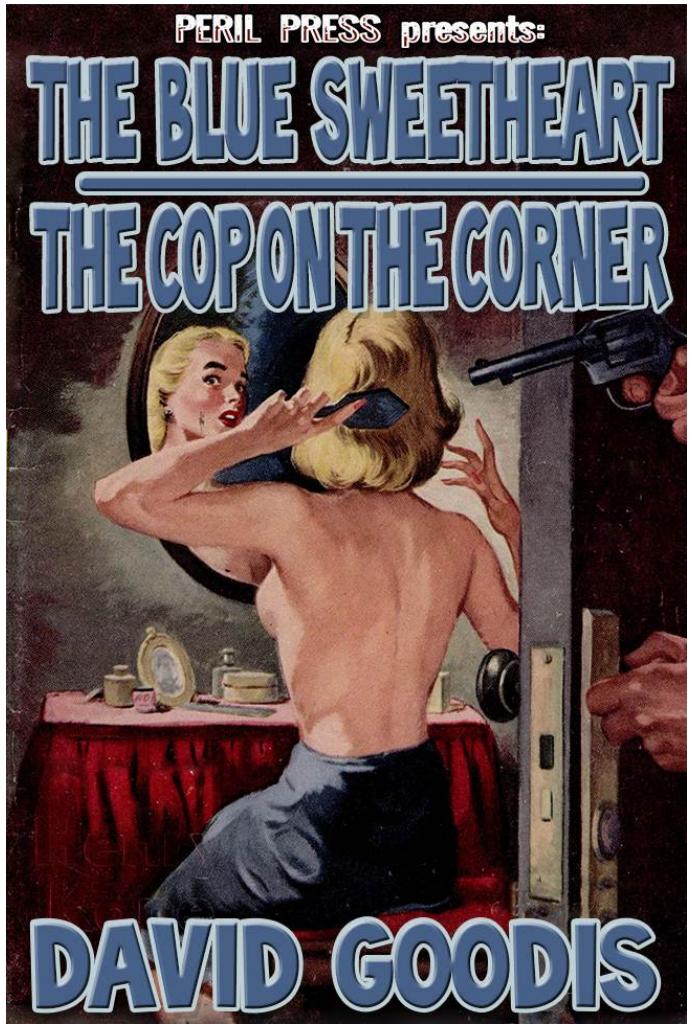
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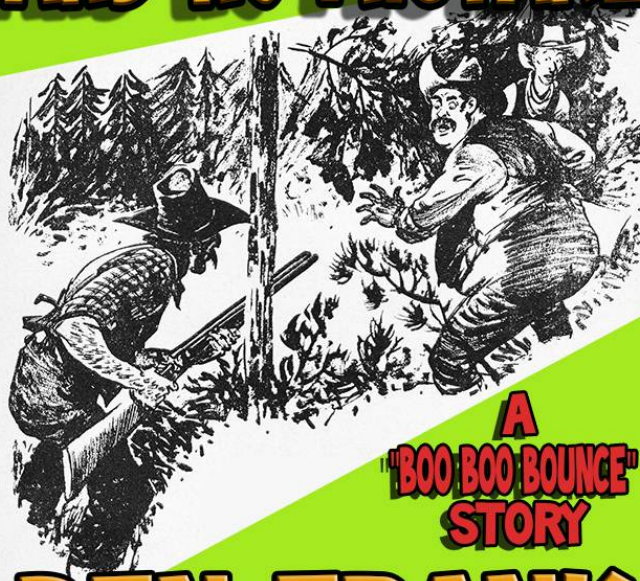

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